DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 422 453 UD 032 513

TITLE	Selected Readings on School Reform. Vol. 2, No. 3.
INSTITUTION	Thomas B. Fordham Foundation, Washington, DC.
PUB DATE	1998-00-00
NOTE	159p.
PUB TYPE	Collected Works - General (020)
EDRS PRICE	MF01/PC07 Plus Postage.
DESCRIPTORS	Accountability; *Charter Schools; Educational Assessment; *Educational Change; Educational Testing; Elementary Secondary Education; Higher Education; *School Choice; School Restructuring; *Standards; Teacher Education; Teaching Methods; *Urban Schools; Urban Youth
IDENTIFIERS	*Reform Efforts

ABSTRACT

This selection of readings in the field of educational reform presents 46 articles, mostly from the news media, and 2 cartoons related to improvement of the educational system. It opens with "Network Notes," brief reports and reviews about events and recent publications of interest to those concerned with educational reform. The first set of essays, "The Front Lines," discusses school reform in practice, as it is being carried out today. The second section, "Charter Schools," looks at the charter school movement and the many obstacles charter schools are facing in 1998. As has been the case throughout the brief history, reviews of charter schools are mixed. "School Choice--And Choices" presents articles considering school choice initiatives in various parts of the country and public response to these efforts. "Standards, Tests, and Accountability" groups some articles on educational assessment and standards for achievement. A section on "Teacher Talent" considers teacher education and qualifications, and what should be done to improve teacher competence. "Curriculum and Pedagogy" presents articles on subject content and teaching methods in the context of educational reform. A section on "Higher Education" presents articles on educational equality, standards, and distance education. A "Grab Bag" section contains articles of interest in a variety of areas, including class size and parent participation. (SLD)

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Selected Readings on School Reform

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Summer 1998
Vol. 2, No. 3

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Summer 1998

Dear Education Reformer,

Greetings. We hope you're having a fantastic summer. The school reform movement certainly is. In case you've been out of the country (or taking vacation really seriously), we provide you an update on some historic happenings.

In the past several months, school choice scored several break-throughs. The highlights include a privately-financed plan to offer vouchers to all low-income children in the Edgewood School District, adjoining San Antonio; the launch, thanks to Messrs. Teddy Forstmann and John Walton and a few colleagues, of a massive nationwide private scholarship program; the remarkably strong Wisconsin Supreme Court decision upholding vouchers for religious schools; and the conversion of Teachers' College President Arthur Levine to the cause of vouchers. Using Paul Gigot's image, it feels like a dam is breaking.

On the other hand, it's been a tough couple of months for charter schools, at least in the press. Even as several more states have enacted charter laws (and some, such as New York, have backed away from the precipice), sharp criticisms have been published, arguing that some charters are selling parents a bag of goods. We include for your inspection *The New York Times Magazine's* "Schools for Sale" and *U.S. News & World Report's* "The New Education Bazaar," among others.

We also invite your attention to several grand critiques of the conventional wisdom about teacher education, one by Heather Mac Donald and two by Michael Podgursky and Dale Ballou. Mac Donald went undercover for *City Journal* to investigate the nation's shoddy schools of education—and lived to write a penetrating review. Podgursky and Ballou's *Public Interest* piece finds plenty to fault in the recommendations of the National Commission on Teaching and America's Future, and their *Education Week* commentary questions the efficacy of that near-sacred cow, the National Board for Professional Teaching Standards.

Our brace of hard-working summer interns--Brad White and Mark Scheffler—did most of the heavy lifting on this issue. Brad just graduated from Vanderbilt (and is eager to stick with the field of education reform) while Mark will return to Grove City College for his senior year. We think you'll agree that they did a fine job.

Obviously, the education world no longer slows down for summer break. Enjoy the reading. We'll see you again in the Fall.

Sincerely,

Chester E. Finn, Jr.
President

Michael J. Petrilli
Program Director

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Network Notes

AFT Resolution on Beginning Reading Instruction

Up for approval at the July convention of the American Federation of Teachers, this policy statement might serve as the treaty for the reading wars. After years of phonics versus whole-language rhetoric, the AFT statement wisely urges both—in a carefully crafted combination. According to the resolution, students "must learn phonics: the ability to link sounds to specific letters or combinations of letters that are used to represent them in written language. And the association between letters and sounds must become virtually automatic, so that students learn to decode words almost instantly and are able to concentrate on the meaning of written text."

Once this precondition is met, explains the AFT, children can explore the world of literature, storytelling, and creative writing. Phonics and literature in combination build a strong foundation for a lifetime of reading.

Kudos to the AFT for this dose of common sense about the most basic of basic skills. Why, we keep wondering, do they want to marry a big union that has long been devoted to the "whole language" approach?

Get your hands on the resolution by surfing to the AFT web site at www.aft.org or by calling (202) 879-4400. *MJP*

A Hope in the Unseen

Reality has a way of making rhetoric seem irrelevant. This painfully honest account of a young man's journey from inner-city D.C. to Brown University highlights many of the tragedies of today's education system while telling an amazing story of human perseverance. Author Ron Suskind of the *Wall Street Journal* spent four years tracking Cedric Jennings. With painstaking accuracy and detail, Suskind relays Jennings's struggle to escape from a woebegone Washington neighborhood and his longing to find a place in the Ivy League.

Besides being a remarkable personal history, this book puts names and places to ideas like standards, culture of achievement, and remediation. You will cheer for Cedric, and for his devoted mother, as he fights his way out of a system that does not cherish him. You will long for him to succeed at Brown, while also wondering if he can accomplish this. You will hate a system that does its best to discourage him, partly because he is poor and of color, partly because the system is profoundly incompetent and uncaring.

Most of all, you will walk away with a refreshed awareness that life in inner-city schools is complicated. Charter schools, higher standards, accountability, and the like are now sweeping D.C. We think they will help Cedric's younger peers. But it won't be easy, for, as this book so clearly shows, education is an intensely human experience. And humans are enormously complex.

Look for it in your local bookstore (published by Broadway Books, 1998, ISBN# 0-7679-0125-8). Hard cover sells for $25. *MJP*

The Troubling State of General Education: A Study of Six Virginia Public Colleges and Universities

By now, everyone knows that core academic subjects like Shakespeare and Western Civ. are being shoved aside by courses such as "Pop Music" and "The History of the Pro Athlete" on many a college campus. In this report, The Virginia Association of Scholars set out to learn exactly what constitutes "general education"—the core curriculum—in six major institutions of higher learning across the Old Dominion. Their central finding: college students are not studying the essentials. There are plenty of courses to choose from, but the requirements are broad and nebulous and there is no reason to suppose that students are well-equipped to make wise selections.

The report examines the state of the core curriculum today, then traces the evolution since 1964. Find it on the web at www.nas.com or e-mail the National Association of Scholars at nas@nas.org. For the technologically-impaired, send snail-mail to National Association of

Scholars at 575 Ewing Street, Princeton, NJ 08540-2741, call (609) 693-7878, or fax (609) 683-0316. *BRW*

Educational and Labor Market Performance of GED Recipients

In this volume, the U.S. Department of Education compiles its research on General Educational Development test takers. The report provides an overview of the GED program, including an analysis of its academic and occupational purposes. The findings indicate that GED recipients outperform high school dropouts in academic and occupational pursuits. Although they do nearly as well at post-secondary institutions as high school graduates, GED recipients tend to earn less in the workforce. The report concludes with a survey of the armed forces' experience with GED recipients versus high school graduates and dropouts. If you're looking for data on GED recipients, this report is valuable. You can order a free copy from DOE by writing them in Washington, DC 20208-5721 or calling 1-800-USA-LEARN. *MAS*

Public Charter Schools

The Center for Educational Innovation at the Manhattan Institute recently sponsored a forum on charter schools to drum up support for the concept in New York. While few of the panelists made any groundbreaking statements, the companion document features a diverse array of charter school advocates, from state legislators to community development agents. Interested in New York's charter school movement? Order your free copy by calling CEI at (212) 599-7000, faxing them at (212) 599-700, or e-mailing cei@manhattan-institute.org. CEI's address is 52 Vanderbilt Ave., New York, NY 10017. *MAS*

Who Should Teach in our Public Schools?

This Carnegie Mellon study of teacher selection and hiring practices in Pennsylvania makes some sobering observations and suggests a few interesting solutions. According to the study, written by Carnegie-Mellon economist Robert Strauss, Pennsylvania makes it relatively easy to obtain and keep a teaching certificate. Its teachers do not perform well on standardized tests, and a highly localized employment market for teachers adds to the quality barrier, not least because many school boards and superintendents decline to formalize the hiring process through written procedures or consistent criteria.

To end this stagnation, the study suggests several reforms. First, it recommends a battery of tests—for both teachers and students—that would hold teachers accountable for what they and their students know. Second, it advocates the introduction of teacher choice for students—allowing students to "vote with their feet," enrolling with teachers of their choosing, and encouraging schools to dismiss teachers who cannot attract students. [To read more about this, see Chris Satullo's "Squeezing the Lemons of Teaching" in our Teacher Talent section.] The paper offers detailed analysis of the Pennsylvania teachers market and some interesting points concerning teacher-hiring practices in general. You can download the paper at www.heinz.cmu.edu/~rs9f/. You can get a hardcopy by calling the Heinz School of Public Policy at (412) 268-3840 or faxing them at (412) 268-7036. *MAS*

Deregulating Teacher Training in Wisconsin

Not only does it have a great pro football team, the Dairy State has also produced some fantastic ideas on how to clean up the teacher training mess. This reader-friendly report from the Wisconsin Public Policy Institute outlines the problem and offers seven bold recommendations for action.

The problem, simply, is that Wisconsin (like virtually all states) recruits, trains, and certifies teachers bureaucratically. The process is driven by paper credentials, rules, and regulations. The system does not allow flexibility at the local level, encourage talented mid-career professionals to enter the field, or place a premium on teachers who know their subjects well. Not to mention that it's expensive and that two-thirds of all teachers trained by publicly-funded institutions in Wisconsin never teach a day in the state.

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So what do authors Mark Schug and Richard Western, both teacher-educators themselves, suggest? They would slash regulations and decentralize decision-making to the district level. Districts would be allowed to recruit, hire, and train future teachers as they see fit, and would hire whom they like. And schools would institute paid internships to get new teachers up to speed.

You may have heard these ideas before, but it's worth seeing them placed in the context of a real-live state. Check it out by calling the Wisconsin Policy Research Institute at (414) 241-0514, faxing a request to (414) 241-0774, or e-mailing WPRI@pitnet.net. They'll send it for free. *MJP*

The Myth That Schools Shortchange Girls: Social Science in the Service of Deception

In 1990, the American Association of University Women released a study (followed by a huge publicity campaign) highlighting its alleged "research" finding that girls get gypped in U.S. classrooms. There followed innumerable "dialogues," recommendations, and policy changes, all in an attempt to rid the nation's schools of gender-inequity.

But the AAUW got it wrong. So says a new report, prepared for the Women's Freedom Network by University of Alaska professor Judith Kleinfeld. She terms the AAUW study "a political strategy designed to gain advantages for females and to promote the special interests of one group of beneficiaries, well-educated women."

The facts according to Kleinfeld: from grade school through college, girls get better grades than boys; women earn the majority of bachelor's and master's degrees; students of both sexes agree that teachers show no bias against girls; and females suffer no dramatic decline in self-esteem at adolescence. One by one, Kleinfeld exposes conventional beliefs about gender roles in the classroom as myths. These fallacies disguise the encouraging strides that females have made in closing education gaps over the past two decades, draw resources from the population that is truly underserved (African-American males), and lead teachers to focus on non-academic goals for females, such as raising self-esteem.

To obtain this brave and candid appraisal of how girls fare in U.S. schools, write the Women's Freedom Network at 4410 Massachusetts Avenue, NW, Suite 179, Washington, D.C. 20016 or call 202-885-6245. The Network is on the web at www.womensfreedom.org. One copy of the report costs $5.00. It is worth every penny. *BRW*

Voucher Wars

This 50-page pamphlet, published by the Milton and Rose D. Friedman Foundation, is subtitled "Strategies and Tactics as School Choice Advocates Battle the Labor Leviathan." The report doesn't give any guidance on how to eliminate the black helicopters, but it does detail the "art of war" for pro-choice forces. Chock-full of strategic defense plans and tactical offensive maneuvers garnered from the history of the school choice movement, along with inspirational quotes from Napoleon and Sun Tzu, "Voucher Wars" provides an arsenal of ammunition for school choice footsoldiers.

For a free copy, call the Milton and Rose D. Friedman Foundation at (317) 681-0745, write them at One American Square, Suite 2440, Post Office Box 82078, Indianapolis, Indiana 46282, fax them at (317) 681-0945 or surf to www.friedmanfoundation.org. *BRW*

Growth in School: Achievement Gains from the Fourth Grade to the Eighth Grade

Last month, we brought you a landmark study by Herbert J. Walberg, "Spending More While Learning Less: U.S. School Productivity in International Perspective." In his report, Walberg used "value-added" indicators to show that year-to-year gains on tests of student achievement are lower in the U.S. than in every other industrialized nation.

Not to be outdone, the Policy Information Center of the Educational Testing Service has recently used advanced "value-added" techniques to analyze state-level NAEP data. The results are fascinating. For example, students in Arkansas (the state with the lowest average) learn as much math each year as students in Maine (the state with the highest average NAEP score). The achievement gains between grades 4 and 8 by Whites, Blacks, Hispanics, and American Indians are virtually identical from grade to grade. Pupils in Nebraska and Michigan learn much more each year than those in Georgia and the District of Columbia.

Overall, unfortunately, U.S. students showed less achievement gain between 1992-1996 than between 1978-1982. The ETS analysts also found that an "advanced" fourth grader is better at math than a "basic" eighth grader.

If you want all the details of this intelligent analysis, you can order a copy (for $9.50, prepaid) from the Policy Information Center at ETS, Mailstop 04-R, Rosedale Road, Princeton, NJ 08541-0001. Their phone number is (609) 734-5694 and their e-mail address is pic@ets.org. Save time and money by downloading the report from www.ets.org/research. *BRW*

Bad Teachers

This 300-page book by Guy Strickland has drawn raves from Thomas Sowell, who writes, "If you buy only one book on education in your lifetime, this is the one to buy." We might not go that far, but we certainly laud its no-nonsense, user-friendly approach. Written for parents by an ex-teacher and school administrator in refreshingly jargon-free language, this book singles out the main cause of many of our education problems—inept educators—and suggests practical strategies for dealing with them. *Bad Teachers* offers parents sound advice for identifying, confronting, and, when necessary, avoiding bad teachers in their children's schools.

Strickland makes sure to acknowledge that, "like any profession, teaching spans a wide range of abilities," but for the most part, *Bad Teachers* stays true to its title, which can mislead the reader to believe that all school problems are the fault of bad teachers. This book is likely to ruffle some feathers, not least because of its assumption that parents truly know best when it comes to their children's education.

Purchase *Bad Teachers* in your local bookstore; it will set you back $14. If you have a school-aged child, it will be a worthy investment. *Bad Teachers* is published by Pocket Books and is ISBN# 0-671-52934-X. *BRW*

The Metropolitan Life Survey of The American Teacher 1998: Building Family-School Partnerships

Viewed in isolation, this nationwide survey of 1,000-plus teachers and 1,300-plus students in grades 7-12 doesn't tell us much that we didn't already know. Teachers and students crave parental involvement. High levels of such involvement are associated with child achievement. Parent apathy is related to student failure. Parents in inner-city schools and those who are economically or educationally deprived are less involved than other parents. And so on.

But when compared with a similar MetLife study from 1987 (as intended), this survey suggests that we're narrowing the home-school gap. Teachers today are more willing to invite parental involvement in schools than they were a decade ago and they are more willing to let parents have a say in major school decisions and policies. This is obviously a positive development. Is it possible that it has been precipitated in part by the specter of school choice?

Copies of the full 300-page report are available free of charge while they last by writing to MetLife, The American Teacher Survey, P.O. Box 807, New York, NY 10159-0807 or by calling Tricia Brown, Public Relations Account Executive for MetLife, at (212) 578-4072. There is also a downloadable version at www.metlife.com. *BRW*

The Betrayal of History and *A New Generation of History Textbooks*

Want to find out which history books can accurately be deemed *text*books, as opposed to *picture* books? Want to know which tell the story of our past "the way it actually was" and are not contorted by contemporary fads and politics? Want to know which books your children should be reading? Here are two suggestions for a topic that grows in timeliness as California prepares to adopt its new tomes in August.

The first, Alexander Stille's "Betrayal of History" (*New York Review of Books*, June 11, 1998) provides excellent insight into the decaying quality of these texts. Due to the *New York Review*'s refusal to let us reproduce this excellent piece without paying an exorbitant fee, we can't share it with you in full. But we recommend your tracking it down. Stille concludes that, on the whole, "history-lite" prevails. But there is one mostly-sound exception: Joy Hakim's readable and information-packed series, *A History of US*. (To learn more about Ms. Hakim's books and the current state of the History curriculum, see Sol Stern's article in our Curriculum and Pedagogy section.) "The Betrayal of History" can be downloaded from the *New York Review's* web site at http://www.nybooks.com.

Our second suggestion, issued by the American Textbook Council, summarizes recent power plays and political fads in the education publishing business. Here we are reminded that publishers often care more about selling books and portraying demographic groups than about supplying teachers and children with interesting, intelligible, and accurate texts.

You can obtain a free copy of "A New Generation of History Textbooks" by writing to the American Textbook Council at 475 Riverside Drive, Room 448, New York, NY 10115 or by calling (212) 870-2760. You can fax your order to (212) 870-3454. They can also be reached via e-mail at atc@columbia.edu. *BRW*

The Educational System in Japan: Case Study Findings

Co-led by Harold Stevenson and Shin-Ying Lee, this case study surveyed Japan's education system through field research in three locations. The report was recently published (after long delays) by the U.S. Department of Education to provide some context for the TIMSS reports. It highlights a system that provides a uniform, basic education for all students through junior high, then tracks them rather rigidly based on entrance exam scores. These scores predetermine much of the Japanese student's future. This "exam hell" has its downside as well as its strong incentive effect, of course. While many parents complain of the pressure, few seem to fault individual schools or teachers.

The report serves as a comprehensive survey of Japanese education, contrasting it in many ways to American practices. For a free copy, call the U.S. Department of Education at 1-800-USA-LEARN, write the DOE at 600 Independence Ave. SW, Washington D.C., 20202—or download it at www.ed.gov. *MAS*

Network Notes are written by Bradford R. White, Mark A. Scheffler, and Michael J. Petrilli.

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Selected Readings on School Reform

The Front Lines

We throw out the first pitch of the summer edition of *Selected Readings* with a glimpse at the "front lines" of school reform.

Leading off is our own Chester E. Finn, Jr., who examines federal policy in "Clinton Flunks," from *The Weekly Standard*. He ties current Congressional action on the "Coverdell bill" to the upcoming reauthorization of the Elementary and Secondary Schools Act (which carries the bulk of federal K-12 funding), and suggests that the time is at hand for a fundamental rethinking of the federal role.

Next, we journey to the West Coast to visit one of the rising stars in the education firmament, Arizona's State Superintendent Lisa Graham Keegan. While you may recognize Mrs. Keegan's name from a number of recent articles, we felt David Brooks's piece from *The Weekly Standard,* entitled "Lisa Graham Keegan, Too Good For the GOP?" shows exceptional insight. We're especially taken with her notion that one must use power to overcome power. With her shrewd blend of libertarianism and trust-busting, Keegan is reinvigorating education in the Sunshine State–and far beyond.

Then to Amity Shlaes's well-written *Wall Street Journal* piece on Vermont's fractious school financing arrangements. One of a slew of states whose prior arrangements had been dubbed unconstitutional, Vermont's new financing scheme has riled more than a few families in the Green Mountain State—from both sides of the political tracks.

Finally, in "Prevailing Perceptions of Public Schools," Deborah Wadsworth sets the record straight on what is really worrying Americans about their schools. Education savings accounts? Increased choice? Equitable financing schemes? Wadsworth's answer, backed by extensive surveys and interviews, is none of the above. At the top of the list for parents, teachers, and students—a list compiled even before the recent spree of school shootings—are safe and drug-free schools that are conducive to learning. Is that too much to ask? Moreover, Wadsworth wonders, can other reforms succeed if these concerns aren't first addressed?

BRW

Weekly Standard, June 15, 1998

CLINTON FLUNKS

by Chester E. Finn Jr.

ANY DAY NOW, OUR "EDUCATION PRESIDENT" will strangle another newborn education program in its crib.

The last victim was a small voucher program that would have helped 2,000 impoverished residents of the District of Columbia flee the capital's rotten public-education system for the haven of safe, effective private and parochial schools—just as the Clinton and Gore children have done. "We must strengthen the public schools, not abandon them," thundered the veto message from the Oval Office. The cynical subtext, however, was, "Do as we say, not as we do."

Days later, the *Washington Post* reported the results of its own survey: Fifty-six percent of D.C. residents—including three-fifths of blacks and two-thirds of public-school parents—favor the kind of program that the president killed. But such data cut little ice at the White House. Sure, Bill Clinton often panders, and nowhere more blatantly than in education—witness his promotion of smaller classes and "universal" college attendance. But when it comes to placing K-12 dollars in parents' hands, even the will of the people cannot save programs that rile Bill Clinton's establishment friends.

The next candidate for execution is the measure known in Beltway argot as the Coverdell bill, after the Georgia senator who introduced it. Currently making its way through a Senate-House conference committee, this bill has become an ornate assemblage of programs and prohibitions and is meant by its backers to embody the Republican national agenda for K-12 education. Several key provisions have elicited veto threats from the White House, and the GOP leadership is weighing various parliamentary tactics to make the bill as awkward as possible for the president to kill. (One rumor has Ways and Means chairman Bill Archer tacking it to the hard-to-veto IRS-reform bill.)

At its core is Coverdell's proposal to expand tax-sheltered education savings accounts (a form of IRA) and—here's the hot button—allow them to be used not only for higher education but also for K-12 expenses, including private-school tuition.

Opponents charge that the actual benefit would amount to just a few dollars per household and that little of it would accrue to poor families, who pay little in taxes in the first place. But those are debating points. What's really at issue is a crucial precedent: whether so much as a dime of federal education aid will be entrusted—even indirectly, via the tax code—to parents rather than public-school systems. For if families can handle a dime, why not a dollar? And if a dollar, then how about the $15 billion or so that Congress will be steering when it takes up the reauthorization of the Elementary and Secondary Education Act (ESEA) next year? Barring a November upset, this will be the first time a GOP majority on Capitol Hill has had the chance to shape that huge mass of programs and outlays. For U.S. education policy, the stakes could not be higher. This year's action is an important preview.

Today, as has been true since Lyndon Johnson's time, all federal K-12 dollars sluice directly into state and local public-school coffers. This is a vast subsidy reserved for education's government-sector producers, completely out of reach of consumers and private-sector competitors. And that, of course, is precisely what suits the teacher unions and the rest of the public-school establishment—Clinton backers all.

But it is not the only possible way of doing things. It's worth recalling that, just a quarter-century ago, a Democratic Congress and Republican White House agreed to a very different strategy for *higher* education. An epic debate had raged over whether Uncle Sam should aid institutions or students. The colleges naturally wanted all the money to come directly to them. And they still get sizable sums. But by 1972 it was settled that grants and loans directly to students would thenceforth be the main channel for federal assistance—and recipients were free to carry those dollars to the institutions of their choice, public, private, proprietary, religious, whatever. Higher-education policy would be driven by consumers rather than producers.

This has not worked perfectly, to be sure. But it has fostered the world's best-regarded higher-education system, a lively marketplace of competing providers, and choosy consumers with plenty of decent options.

Elementary and secondary education, by contrast, remains in the iron grip of a government monopoly propped up by billions of federal dollars. The producers are totally in charge. The consumers (unless rich or lucky) must take what they are given. In terms of quality, this system falls near the bottom on most international rankings (except for spending levels).

Can this be changed? That's the real issue posed by Coverdell's bill. While the bill wouldn't give much aid to any family, it would mark the first time that Uncle Sam had entrusted even a pittance to the K-12 consumer—as bold a departure for education as private-investment accounts would be for Social Security. That's the precedent that Republicans are keen to establish via Coverdell. (The dead D.C. voucher program embodied the same principle.) And that, of course, is precisely what President Clinton and his allies have vowed to block.

The ESEA reauthorization isn't all that lies ahead. The 1998 and 2000 elections are in sight, and both parties are positioning themselves on the education issue, which has risen to the top of many voters' concerns. At heart, the Democrats remain the party of the public-school monopoly, though they are shrewdly advertising such customer-friendly specials as more teachers, smaller classes, and new classrooms. The GOP isn't nearly so deft—and polls show most voters have greater faith in the Democrats' handling of education. Nevertheless, the Republican party is seeking to establish itself as the ally of education's millions of consumers. Both sides claim to be interested in quality and in better teachers, and they sometimes converge in support of innovations such as charter schools (a cross between public education and the free market). But their core difference in philosophy and strategy is more conspicuous today than ever before.

That difference was on display when the Senate debated the Coverdell bill. Dozens of amendments were offered. The Democrats strove to insert subsidies for school construction and additional teachers. These were rebuffed by the GOP majority, which managed to add a dozen riders of its own. Many were sound: permission for single-sex schools to receive federal aid, a phonics-based literacy program, a resolution that 95 percent of Uncle Sam's money should reach the classroom, and so on. One of the riders—Slade Gorton's conversion of most current federal programs into an optional "block grant" for states and communities—is almost as scary to the education establishment as Coverdell's core proposal. (If it survives the conference, it's veto bait, too.)

The Senate blundered, though, when it assented to an amendment by John Ashcroft to ban further development of national tests. After a huge fracas last year, responsibility for shaping voluntary, standards-based tests of 4th-grade reading and 8th-grade math was turned over to the National Assessment Governing Board, which has been quietly and carefully vetting test questions to make sure they're solid. The next step is to "field test" those items to see what happens when children confront them. (Not all test questions "work.") That's what Ashcroft mustered a majority of his colleagues to forbid—as did the House of Representatives earlier in the year.

Though the current plan for national testing sprang from the Clinton White House, the concept of standards-based national tests goes back to the Bush administration, and Republican politicians should realize that it remains vital to the GOP strategy for reform. No consumer-based system works well unless the consumers have reliable information about how the competing producers are doing. In education, that mostly means test scores, child by child and school by school, tied to high standards that signal what well-educated youngsters *should* know.

Practically nobody wants federal officials themselves to set those standards and interpret those scores. But practically everyone who has thought seriously about how to reconstruct American education has figured out that some authoritative body must do this. To block such information, as a majority of congressional Republicans voted to do, is to play into the hands of the school establishment—and continue to deny consumers effective power.

Standards and testing remain GOP blind spots, but the rest of the Coverdell bill is solid. It will, however, almost certainly be vetoed by a president again declaring his fealty to "public education." Republicans lack the votes to override the veto, which means that federal K-12 dollars will continue flowing exclusively to producers. The stage will be set for a clash in the coming elections—as well as in the year to follow, when Congress turns to programs that dispense serious money.

Chester E. Finn Jr. is John M. Olin fellow at the Hudson Institute and president of the Thomas B. Fordham Foundation.

Weekly Standard, April 27, 1998

LISA GRAHAM KEEGAN, TOO GOOD FOR THE GOP?

By David Brooks

Every so often the conservative movement casts up another hero. Sometimes the darling of the moment turns out to be a true hero, like Ward Connerly, the spokesman for the California Civil Rights Initiative. And sometimes the object of our admiration turns out to be Flake-o Supreme—mention the name of ClintonCare fighter Betsy McCaughey in front of a bunch of right-wingers and watch them stare at their shoes and try to change the subject.

At the moment, one of the right-wing poster kids is Lisa Graham Keegan, the Arizona schools chief who has created the most effective charter-school program in the country. Keegan's praises have been sung by the *Wall Street Journal* editorial page, *Reason* magazine, *National Review,* and other right-thinking organs. This time the news is good. Keegan's got the charm and intelligence of a budding political star. In fact, if anything, she is more activist in her political style and nuanced in her policy beliefs than some guardians of Conservative Correctness can acknowledge.

In 1993, Keegan was a thirtysomething state legislator in Phoenix pushing a radical school-reform plan that featured vouchers and parental choice. The state education establishment went apoplectic at the mention of vouchers and succeeded in defeating the bill. But when the legislation was reintroduced without the voucher provision, Keegan's opponents were so busy declaring victory they apparently didn't notice the radical charter-school language still lurking inside. "To this day," she says, "I don't think anybody has read the charter provision to that bill."

The provision turned out to be a time bomb that would lead to the creation of hundreds of independent public schools. It has two key features. First, there is no limit on the number of charter schools that can be established in Arizona, unlike in many states. Second, you don't have to get approval from the local school board to set up a charter (a bit like asking your boss if you can set up a competing firm across the street). Instead, the backers of a charter school—educators or parents or developers or whoever they may be—can go to one of several different bodies for approval, including the State Board of Charter Schools and the State Board of Education. Keegan was so happy with the reform potential of the new law, and so concerned about getting the law implemented properly, that she ran for superintendent of public instruction in 1994 and won.

Conservatives love to talk about charter schools, and with good reason. These are public schools that don't have to kowtow to the big bureaucracies. And while it is early yet, there is already evidence that charter schools significantly improve educational achievement. Moreover, as Lisa Keegan notes, if you want to achieve full school choice eventually, you have to set up charters now. Voters won't endorse school-voucher plans unless they first see independent public schools operating effectively. Arizona now has more than 250 charter schools, with about 27,000 students. Regular public schools have to step up their performance to meet the competition.

But Lisa Graham Keegan is more than just the leading proponent of charter schools. She's an odd mixture of Susan Molinari enthusiasm and Margaret Thatcher defiance. Her biological father abandoned her when she was three months old, eventually going off to run a beatnik coffeehouse in Carmel, Calif. Her mother remarried, choosing a no-nonsense business executive who instilled a competitive spirit in his stepdaughter and a love of political debate. Keegan was the national champion sidesaddle rider in 1978, and she did well enough in high school to be admitted to Stanford, where she majored in linguistics with hopes of becoming either a brain surgeon or a speech pathologist. After graduation she moved back to Arizona to get a masters degree in speech pathology at Arizona State University, then went on to do research at a V.A. hospital on Wernicke's aphasia, a brain disorder that prevents its sufferers from understanding the words that are coming out of their mouths.

You can supply your own joke as to how this research led to a career in politics. During the Evan Mecham scandals, Keegan became interested in, and appalled by, the state legislature. She ran for a seat in 1990, won, and ended up chairing the education committee, which led to her revolutionary bill.

When asked what book most influenced her political outlook, Keegan immediately names Hayek's *Road to Serfdom*. She is on the libertarian side of the Republican party. At a recent conservative get-together, the Dark Ages Weekend, she found herself agreeing with the libertarian speakers. "But when Gary Bauer gets up and talks," she says, "he makes me nervous. I can't go there. I'm just uncomfortable. It feels invasive." Keegan is moderately pro-choice and a big fan of Steve Forbes—at least Forbes as he was in 1996.

But Keegan can be awkward company for Republicans and libertarians. She was the first high-ranking Republican to call for the resignation of Arizona governor Fife Symington. According to *Phoenix* magazine, this meant she was "shunned at Republican functions, tormented by the rumor mill." Symington resigned last year in disgrace. And Keegan recognizes something many libertarians have been loath to acknowledge: If you really want to dismantle the welfare state, you need a period of activist government; you need to centralize authority in order to bust entrenched interests. Many libertarians would rather preserve an ideologically pure anti-government position, which calls for dismantling power but never using it. That position is fine for those howling at government from the outside. But it doesn't amount to a governing philosophy, and it isn't much help if you are trying to modernize government from within. The Republicans' failure to come up with a governing philosophy explains the party's stagnation.

Keegan is way ahead of them. For example, she is now waging a frontal assault on the notion of local control of education. Republicans love to talk about local control; it has that comforting populist ring that gets GOP heads bobbing. But it's also a powerful barrier to education reform. Earlier this month, Keegan was testifying before Congress on school reform when, as she recalls, some of the members "alluded to the argument that the federal government should not try to denigrate local control. I just wanted to come out of my chair. Local control is a monopoly. You should not denigrate parent control, or student equality, or the decisions at a local school, but you absolutely should get in the face of local control. . . . Local control means no change. You eliminate charter schools. You eliminate voucher programs. Because all those things happen in spite of local governing boards, not because of them."

Keegan is in the midst of a long and strenuous effort to centralize Arizona's school-funding mechanism. Her goal is to eliminate local property-tax-based bond initiatives and replace the lost revenue from increased state sales taxes. Instead of districts' raising the money for their own schools, the state would raise money and allocate it to students. State dollars would go to whatever school the child attended. This plan would accomplish two things. First, it would standardize the sum spent on a child's education. Currently, rich suburbs spend a lot of money per child, while poor districts spend only a little, a pattern that has been declared unconstitutional in Arizona and many other states. Second, the plan would attach money, even for capital expenses, to the child. That ultimately would shift power to parents, who could send their kids to new charter schools, and away from district bureaucracies. "This is the single most important issue. It breaks it open," Keegan says.

A number of groups are unhappy with Keegan's ideas. The district bureaucracies, obviously—they've taken to labeling her the "superintendent for *private* instruction" because of her school-choice philosophy. Also, "the bonding houses are just wigging out. They are unhappy in the extreme," Keegan notes. They'd lose a highly profitable (and some would say corrupting) line of business. Then there are the Republican politicos, who don't want to do anything that might appear to trample on the holy notion of local control. "I've sat down with Steve Forbes about this and Dan Quayle," she says. "I like Steve Forbes very much. His answer to me is the same one. 'We need local control.' So far, I just can't move him."

Finally—and this might be the real reason for the politicos' reaction—there are the residents of the rich school districts. Under Keegan's plan to equalize per-pupil spending across the state, spending in the richest districts would go down. Keegan's father recently gave her a chart that she put up on her wall, showing that the 10 richest districts in Arizona are also the 10 most Republican. During one tussle last summer, Keegan lashed out at critics from the Madison District, calling them a "gang of the rich."

Keegan insists that equal per-pupil spending is the morally compelling position. It's the only position consistent with equal opportunity. It's also politically popular. And not coincidentally, it is a necessary component of a school-choice regime. Yet she watches her fellow Republicans invent high-minded reasons to defend the unequal spending patterns that have been struck down in state after state. In truth, it is odd to see Republicans rising to the defense of unequal spending, since a favorite Republican talking point on education is that there is no relationship between spending and student achievement.

Keegan's other great activist and centralizing initiative has been to create a set of rigorous statewide academic standards and tests. Before her tenure, Arizona had some vague standards, on the order of "Students shall appreciate literature." Arizona's new standards earn A and B marks from the Fordham Foundation, the organization that conducts thorough reviews of state education standards. Tests will start in 2001, and students must pass them in order to get diplomas. The tests have sent a wave of anxiety through the Arizona education community. Keegan insists that all students must take the tests in English. Moreover, the proposed exercises are not easy: "Write a narrative or story that develops complex characters, plot structure, point of view and setting; organizes ideas in meaningful sequence; and includes sensory details and concrete language to advance the story line." Keegan also says she won't allow students to use calculators on the math sections.

Keegan is a big believer in standards and tests. "Standards are a nonnegotiable piece on the way to full-out school choice. There's no reason to have a choice of really lousy schools. We all say the market will drive you to excellence, but it will only drive you to excellence if you know what excellence is."

In a piece on Keegan in the April 6 *National Review*, Clint Bolick argued that her strong state standards can be used to head off national standards and tests. But Bolick, who opposes national tests and standards, did not mention that Keegan herself supports them. She points out that right now, state school chiefs, who are political animals, get to create the standards and tests by which their own performance is judged. There has to be a national audit: "The state standards have to be enforced by a national standard," Keegan argues. "Right now, states can make outrageous claims that are unwarranted. It's not just a good idea—it's absolutely essential." At the same time, Keegan, like all conservative education experts, can see how national tests could be captured and abused. A politically fashionable or easy national test would actually undermine state tests if students who were failing at the state level suddenly passed an easy national exam. "National tests have incredible potential. The fear comes in what's going to be on them," she says.

Lisa Graham Keegan and the handful of top education experts who have served in Republican administrations, such as Bill Bennett, Diane Ravitch, Chester Finn, and Bruno Manno, come from different perspectives—from libertarian to neo-liberal. But they arrive at similar positions: charter schools on the way to school choice; rigorous standards backed up by independently formulated national tests. Yet it's striking that this consensus of the experts is politically incorrect in lay Republican circles and among many movement conservatives.

Republicans love to talk about the power of the marketplace, but they don't want to talk about the government activism—which in Arizona involves raising state taxes—that is required to bring about a school-choice regime. Republicans have almost religious affection for local control and a sometimes unthinking reverence for the small-scale institutions of civil society. But they don't have any way to confront the entrenched local associations that are bastions of the status quo.

Some Republicans are so hostile to government they won't contemplate government action even if it is necessary to bust concentrated power and enhance individual freedom. Finally, many Republicans have retained the defeatist mentality of a minority party. They assume that any reform they set in motion will eventually be taken over by their political rivals. In sum, Republicans say they want to change the education system radically, but their mental habits contribute to the stagnation we have seen, especially in Washington, over the last few years.

Lisa Graham Keegan is a rarity among politicos not only because she has retained a sense of humor about herself, but also because she has created a style of conservative activism that actually produces change Conservatism may have cast up a true hero this time—whether or not it deserves her. ◆

Wall Street Journal, **April 22, 1998**

Vermont Levels Its Schools

By AMITY SHLAES

Parents are all alike, even famous parents. John Irving had just enrolled his son in a public grammar school when he learned that his state, Vermont, was about to take a hatchet to the local school budget. So the author of "The World According to Garp" did what any other parent would do. He went ballistic. He wrote an angry letter to his lawmaker, in this case the president of the Vermont Senate, which the Associated Press reported. "You people aren't Democrats. I was a Democrat," he wrote, underlining the word was. "You're Marxists!"

Many parents would understand Mr. Irving's rage. After all, he and his wife had thought hard before they moved to southwest Vermont. "Like a lot of families in this area, this choice came because of the schools," he says. "Now we will see those schools decimated."

Mr. Irving's is just one of many Vermont voices now rising in protest against the state's new system of school finance. Last spring, Vermonters watched in trepidation as the state's Supreme Court cavalierly junked 200 years of tradition. It ruled that their local property tax system, which dated back to Ethan Allen's days, violated the state's constitution, which also came from that period.

That trepidation turned to horror as Vermonters learned what state lawmakers were putting into Act 60, the law to implement the court's ruling. No longer would Vermont's tiny towns collect property taxes and then decide how to dispose of their money at the annual town meeting. Now Montpelier would take over like a high-powered Robin Hood. The state lawmakers' first move was to raise taxes on many citizens and businesses. They also designed special property-tax bombs for ski resorts. Part II of the plan was grabbing all property taxes revenues for state coffers. Then came Part III: Montpelier would dole out the school money, a flat $5,010 a year per child, plus an adjustment here or there. This even for communities that pay far more than that in property taxes.

'Class Warfare'

"This is class warfare, class warfare that doesn't even work," says Jeffrey Wennberg, mayor of Rutland. Rutland is supposed to win subsidies under the new arrangement, yet Mr. Wennberg still hates Act 60. Under the new plan, he says, "lots of poor people are still losers. Everyone knows this isn't about education. Those [supporters] are just pathological redistributionists."

By now, the Green Mountain State's judges and lawmakers ought to have known better. Equalization suits, the formal name for the Vermont action, have been rolling states for nearly three decades. More than 20 states, including California, New Jersey, Ohio and Texas, have revamped, centralized or otherwise adjusted the tax system in the name "equity." The American Civil Liberties Union pursues these suits as a sequel to busing; its state affiliates conduct themselves like battalions in a nationwide civil war. Anyone who resists gets labeled a Nimby (for "Not in My Back Yard") or worse. Yet the results of equalization are frightening. Such efforts give more to state education departments and teacher unions—but they also damage schools, property values and local economies. Often, as in California, the poor kids the projects were meant to help are also the losers.

To see equalization at work, it helps to look at a place like Vermont. The state's Democratic lawmakers and the Vermont-NEA, the local teacher's union, call Act 60 a chance for equality. But citizens point out that the law is actually generating strong divisions. It classes Vermont's towns into two opposing camps: "receiving towns" that get more than they put in, and "gold towns," which must share their bounty and cut their schools.

Woe to the school that doesn't go along with the state's vision of education. Act 60, gives Montpelier the explicit right to close a disobedient school. "Power follows money," comments Mayor Wennberg. And by seizing the property tax kitty, he points out, Montpelier has doubled its power. "Property tax revenues in this state equal the revenues of all other state taxes combined."

Mary Barrosse, a mother of three in East Dorset, talks about how Act 60 wrecked her family's careful plans. She and her husband bought a smaller house than they otherwise would have just to be in their school district. Now Act 60 says Dorset must cut back spending 30%. The student-teacher ratio will go up. Gym will be cut. "This was just so wrong," Ms. Barrosse says, recalling her first reaction. To be sure, Montpelier did leave a loophole that said that towns could raise yet more money if they wanted to spend above their block grants. But a "gold town" that raises extra money for its schools must raise extra money for *other* towns as well. East Dorset would have to double Ms. Barrosse's property taxes in order to maintain its current school budget.

The new law classes towns into two opposing camps: "Receiving towns" and "gold towns," which must share their bounty and cut their schools.

Even citizens of "receiving towns" aren't happy. When Mayor Wennberg ran the numbers for Rutland's 8,000-odd tax-paying households, he found that some 7,000 of them would pay as much or more in taxes under Montpelier's new regime. The remaining 1,000 would get a tax reduction worth just $156 on average. Mayor Wennberg's biggest concern is the tax hike facing the Killington ski retreat, 10 miles down the road, where many Rutlanders work. Act 60 will triple the resort's tax bill, to $750,000 from $250,000.

The blow to the state's fragile economy preoccupies other citizens, Democrat and Republican alike. Many post their rage and sorrow on act60.org, a Web site for opponents of Act 60. Fred Schwacke, a member of the Winhall school board, wrote that with Act 60, "we defile and impede the recreation industry that is arguably our financial cornerstone. Let's not forget that IBM's founder Tom Watson loved to ski at Stowe, and that recreational draw is a major reason why Vermont's largest employer [IBM] was located here."

The end of local control also galls Vermonters, whose tradition of home rule is so strong that they started their history by seceding from New York. Even today citizens recall Ethan Allen's fury: "These bloody lawgivers know we must oppose their execution of the law, where it points directly at our property . . ."

Vermonters also spend a lot of time wondering at the Supreme Court's treatment of the case. A lower court judge had asked the Supreme Court to settle on a specific issue in the equalization case. Instead the high court—the bench included a justice who had served on the governor's equalization team—chose to rule on the entire matter, all without any trial. Nowhere does the state constitution mention equal spending for schools; the constitution requires only that "a competent number" of schools be maintained in the state. Even the plaintiffs' lawyer, Robert Gensburg, wrote in the Vermont Law Review that "I felt my heart sink" when he first scanned the constitution seeking language that could force equal spending. Nonetheless the Supreme Court backed his argument. Its comments were textbook examples of what's wrong with the "living constitution" school of legal theory: "While history must inform our constitutional analysis, it cannot bind it."

Citizens are also angry at state lawmakers, particularly Democrats, who had won control of the House and Senate with promises of property tax *cuts*. John McClaughry, a former lawmaker, president of the libertarian Ethan Allen Institute and town moderator of Kirby (population 387) sums up: "Unless Act 60 is reversed, it will mark the beginning of a sad end to a long and justly celebrated history of independence."

A look at states that preceded Vermont through the equalization mill more than confirms Mr. McClaughry's fears. Ohio and New Jersey aren't really more equal than they were before equalization, just more tortured. Then there is California. Its equalization lawsuit, *Serrano v. Priest*, came in the early 1970s. Following *Serrano*, Sacramento did equalize spending. But angry citizens also mounted the Proposition 13 tax revolt. William Fischel, a Dartmouth economist, argues that *Serrano* caused Proposition 13. Voters weren't just the Nimby suburbanites the press had made them out to be. They were responding reasonably, the way anyone would after losing control—by opting out.

'Victory of Losers'

The best evidence for the Fischel thesis comes from Jonathan Kozol, who penned a pro-equalization book, "Savage Inequalities." He wrote of California that "though the plaintiffs won the equity they sought, it is to some extent a victory of losers. Though the state ranks eighth in per capita income in the nation, the share of its income that now goes to public education is a meager 3.8%, placing California forty-sixth among the fifty states."

As for Vermont, its towns are taking stock. Their on-line gossips talk frequently of New Hampshire, which recently had its own equalization suit. Citizens are even looking 22 months down the road, when the presidential primaries will spotlight every aspect of New Hampshire life. Then the nation's parents, by now Nimbys all, will get a chance to convey to the pollsters who ring at dinner hour some of their feelings about equalization suits.

American School Board Journal, May 1998

Prevailing perceptions of public schools

BY DEBORAH WADSWORTH

Three overarching moods—economic anxiety, moral ambiguity, and institutional mistrust—pervade Americans' diagnosis of what is wrong with public education today. The moods are manifested in three images that Americans evoke in all of Public Agenda's research to convey what troubles them about the schools. Over and over, people complain bitterly about the existence of metal detectors at the entrance to schools; about kids hanging around the high school parking lot when they ought to be in class; and about checkout clerks at the local supermarket who lack the skills even to make change. Again and again, they evoke these images almost as metaphors to transmit their authentic concerns—those driven not primarily by the media but by events they experience in their daily lives.

It is valuable to examine each of these images carefully, to better understand the attitudes that they reflect, attitudes that Public Agenda has documented with parents, grandparents, and those without any direct school experience, as well as teachers, principals, superintendents, school board members, business and community leaders, and, most recently, students themselves. Then, it is appropriate to determine the degree to which these images are or are not shaped by journalistic coverage.

Although most Americans have passed through a metal detector at a local airport, few have actually confronted one face-to-face at the entrance to a local school. Nonetheless, the knowledge that even *a single metal detector* exists at the entrance to *a single school* evokes a powerful response. The image may have appeared originally on a television screen or in a newspaper photograph, but its existence has been burned into public consciousness. It signifies to people that their schools—the one institution that had always been safe and inviolate—have been invaded by the violence and drugs that pervade contemporary society. Even the sanctity of schools has been violated by societal upheaval.

In conveying this image, were the media responsible for disseminating untruths or manipulating incipient fears? Did they implant in the public's mind this idea that the schools are unsafe? On the surface, it seems reasonable to assume that media coverage is the culprit, but research does not support that interpretation. Rather, the research reveals that this image, deeply ingrained in the public mind, has a basis in reality. In Public Agenda's 1994 report *First Things First: What Americans Expect from the Public Schools,* 72 percent of the general public and 80 percent of African-American parents identified the presence of too many drugs and too much violence as a serious problem in the public schools in *their own community.*

In other words, people are thinking in terms of their neighborhood schools, not some distant, abstract schools, when they express these concerns. Perhaps more importantly, almost half of teachers and students—47 percent of teachers and 48 percent of students—say drugs and violence are a serious problem in their schools. (These data are from Public Agenda's 1997 report *Getting By: What American Teenagers Really Think About Their Schools.*) Those who conclude that media coverage has affected the perceptions of the general public can hardly dismiss the views of significant numbers of teachers and students, who spend their days in the schools and do not have to rely on the media for those perceptions. They are neither out of touch nor responding to a bad-news bias.

With such opinions rampant, every group surveyed by Public Agenda demands that, before tackling curricular reforms or introducing innovative teacher techniques, schools should be made safe and drug free. Moreover, 76 percent of the public and 84 percent of teachers want youngsters who are caught with weapons or drugs removed from the classrooms. According to *Getting By,* support for this position is very high among teens themselves—66 percent among white students, 77 percent among African-American students, and 74 percent among Hispanic students.

The image of students hanging out in the school parking lot is another metaphor conveying what people think ails public education today. Whereas I suspect that most recent generations have spent time in such activity—or inactivity—and have probably irritated neighborhood residents in the process, until recently teenagers were considered harmless. Today, however, the very presence of seemingly idle teenagers makes adults uneasy, for they symbolize the lack of order and discipline that most people believe should characterize the lives of young people. In a 1997 Public Agenda study conducted on behalf of the Advertising Council, two in three (67 percent) of those surveyed, when asked to describe the first thing that comes to mind about teens, responded with negative impressions. Similarly, the teens interviewed for *Getting By* acknowledged that they often behave badly and know they are threatening to many adults.

Are *these* attitudes driven by media coverage? Hardly. The scenes people describe, which they say they confront on a daily basis, convey in shorthand much that they believe is wrong with our schools. "Why," people ask in focus groups, "aren't these kids in class?" "Doesn't anyone know that they're not in school?" "Who's in charge?" "Why doesn't someone do something about this?"

In *Getting By,* teenagers themselves describe an atmosphere that is unruly, coarse, rough, and not conducive to learning. Seven in 10 say that there are too many disruptive students in *their* classes, and, not unexpectedly, 82 percent say they would learn more in school if these unruly youngsters were removed from regular classes. This is based upon firsthand experiences; they don't have to rely on the media for these impressions. It is no surprise that adults list, following safety, the removal of disruptive students as their next highest priority—73 percent of the general public and 88 percent of teachers support this idea. There is a prevailing sense that classrooms are being held hostage by the few who have made it impossible to teach the many who really would like to learn.

And, finally, there are the countless stories from people's personal experiences of the ubiquitous checkout clerk who can't make change or the telephone operator who can't find a number in Des Moines, which she can't spell, either. Anecdotes about such individuals multiply daily, and while they, too, may have become metaphors—dramatically symbolizing the academic inadequacies of our schools—they are based not on stories from the media but on real life experiences. These experiences lead the public to conclude that the schools are failing to deliver on their most important responsibility.

This failure of the public schools to deliver even the most basic education to all youngsters drives people mad with frustration. Adults wonder how youngsters without adequate skills can possibly succeed in a world that they see as increasingly competitive and unforgiving. They worry about the cost to society of functionally illiterate young people on whom they themselves will shortly be dependent. There is no need for media verification on this matter.

When a *Newsweek* poll, released in April 1997, asked people, "Which of the following is a bigger threat to the U.S.?" only 18 percent responded, "Foreign nations working against us," whereas a resounding 74 percent said, "Young Americans without education, job prospects, or connections to mainstream American life." The public's demand that all youngsters master basic skills, including the new computer technologies needed for the next century, grows out of this anxiety, which is compounded by people's belief that their local neighborhood's schools are currently failing to deliver.

Thus, mastery of the basics remains at the top of the public's reform agenda—along with safety, order, and discipline. Regrettably, many school reformers continue to resist these public priorities, sometimes dismissing such concerns as simplistic and out of touch. Public Agenda has documented a gap between experts and the public over the years on many issues, welfare and health reform included. But nowhere is the disconnect more profound than on the issue of education reform.

First Things First: What Americans Expect from Their Public Schools documented the public's concerns in 1994. The study clarified why the public is not more positively engaged in the process of reform and detailed their lack of confidence in the reformers' agenda. How, people asked then and continue to ask, can learning take place in such a chaotic environment, and shouldn't the environment be fixed before curricular reform and innovative techniques are introduced? Reformers and educators continue to point accusingly at the media for distorting the problems and instilling attitudes that they believe are destroying the public's confidence in the schools. But the reality is that reformers have been slow to accord the highest priority to the issues that most distress the public.

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Selected Readings on School Reform

Charter Schools

As the school year ends for 800-plus charter schools around the nation (those that aren't open year-round, that is), we check on their health and the public's response to them. Seven years after charter schools first hit the reform scene, reviews remain mixed. And while we disagree with the conclusions of some of these articles, we think it's important to understand what's on the minds of critics, as well as advocates.

Our first offering is Michael Winerip's "Schools for Sale," from *The New York Times Magazine*. He begins with a look at school vendors hocking their wares while parents shop for schools in Jersey City—a scene that was unimaginable 10 years ago. A theme of *caveat emptor* pervades this piece, but it is nearly overshadowed by the fresh air of educational innovation and opportunity. Education consumers—parents and families—can't help but be impressed by dynamic new schools, money-back guarantees ("all kids reading by first grade"), and intimate atmospheres. The transition to education-as-marketplace is uneven and fraught with problems, but overall promising.

We continue with a tough (and in our view unbalanced) article, Thomas Toch's *U.S. News & World Report* cover story, "The New Education Bazaar." In visiting a number of charter schools in two states, Toch was dismayed to come across several bad apples that weren't living up to their promises. No doubt some such schools exist—and are a problem for the charter movement, as well as for families and kids touched by them. But Toch's piece doesn't begin to give enough credit to the huge number of great charter schools. Still, he calls attention to the need for stronger and surer means of accountability for these new schools, and legislators are already taking action on the problem (see below). While Toch emerges slightly pessimistic about charter school prospects, his article does carry an important message: parents must be persnickety when selecting schools for their children.

In response to Toch's one-sidedness, the Goldwater Institute's Center for Market-Based Education circulated an articulate defense of Arizona's charter schools. This document takes Toch to task for rushing to judgment after visiting such a small proportion of the state's burgeoning charter schools. Mary Gifford, director of the Center, offers her perspective on charter school accountability, innovation, and performance in Arizona and, suffice to say, she and Toch don't always see eye-to-eye.

Education Week's Lynn Schnaiberg contributes to this conversation with her piece, "Charter Schools Struggle with Accountability." Here, we learn that, in many cases, being held accountable is easier said than done. The more nuanced a school's objectives, the harder it is to tell if they have been adequately fulfilled. We say keep it simple.

We finish with snapshots of charter school activity from across the U.S. It begins in Boston, at the famed City on a Hill Charter School. "Final is Trial for Charter Pupils," written by Lolly Bowean for *The Boston Globe*, highlights the school's creative approach to final exams: Students must present their work to a panel of community volunteers.

"People's Prep" from *The New Republic*, by Mark Francis Cohen, publicizes New Jersey's Samuel DeWitt Proctor Academy Charter school, which he describes as "a cross between an academic boot camp and an elite prep school." Proctor's students emanate from the direst of circumstances to a residential charter school with a (yikes!) $17,000 per-pupil budget funded in part by private donors. The jury is still out when it comes to results (test scores have yet to arrive), but we're betting these kids beat the odds.

In Detroit, even the local school board has joined the charter fracas (perhaps in response to Central Michigan University's energetic chartering activity), sponsoring an unprecedented seven new schools for this coming year. "Detroit Charter Schools Unique," by Charles Hurt of *The Detroit News,* is a great read and good news for charter advocates who thought that LEA's would never approve their own competitors.

There is no doubt that start-from-scratch charter schools face many obstacles in their path to educational excellence, from financing to obtaining facilities to securing staff and students. Valerie Strauss addresses this issue in her *Washington Post* article, "Charter Schools Face Tests in Rush to Get Ready." For anyone who ever thought that charter schools had it easy, this piece is a must read.

Last but not least, we include a short but powerful "Aside" from *The Wall Street Journal*. The news: Pacific Rim Charter School in Boston has offered its students a "learning guarantee." If students don't meet state standards for 10th grade achievement, the school will pay for them to go to school elsewhere. Talk about confidence! Now if we could only get more schools to follow this grand precedent.

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The New York Times Magazine, June 14, 1998

Schools For Sale

With the growing popularity of school choice, yet another treasured public institution falls into the hands of the free market – for better and for worse.

By Michael Winerip
Photographs by Linda Rosier

It was easy to tell right away, walking into the large meeting room, that something hot was for sale and a lot was at stake. A dozen eager company reps — stylish young men and women of all races and backgrounds — stood behind two long tables with slick brochures and stacks of applications in English and Spanish. There were balloons and potted plants everywhere, cookies, pastries, coffee, juices and soft drinks, a room nearby to park the children.

By the time Kathleen Madigan, Ed.D, began her pitch on this April night, it was standing room only, more than 300 Jersey City parents. One father in the audience, Robert Silberman, was struck by how much the meeting felt like a sales presentation at the telecommunications company where he works, while others remarked on the speaker's evangelical tone. But what was being offered was neither cell phones nor God's salvation. The offering to this heavily minority audience in one of the poorest school districts in New Jersey was a free, publicly financed education for their children at a new charter school to be opened in September by Advantage Schools Inc., a Boston-based, for-profit company with schools in Phoenix and Rocky Mount, N.C.

"As we speak," began Madigan, Advantage's curriculum director, "I have kindergartners in Phoenix and North Carolina who can tell you the three phases of matter! ... I have 5-year-olds in North Carolina who know where the prime meridian is! ... We have 200 instructional days, 20 more than the public schools! ... We go from 8 in the morning until 3:30 in the afternoon! Eight in the morning until 3:30! ... We will have a phenomenal staff to make this a reality. We get to choose our teachers. ... We don't say it's the child's fault, or they didn't have a good breakfast, or they came from this kind of family.

"This is how they're taught to walk down the hall," she said, marching, her hands folded in front of her. For an hour those parents sat, rapt, listening to one remarkable story after another. She told them how Advantage ran a direct-instruction school stressing basics, with teachers using daily scripts to drill students. She showed them videos of young black boys reading. "Our children on third level are reading the 'Iliad'; in fifth

In the last decade, as the market ethos has permeated American society, parents and politicians have increasingly demanded accountability from their schools, and by that they mean better test results.

grade they read Homer's 'Odyssey.' . . . Most children don't like to rewrite. Oh no? Our children say, 'Give me one more chance!' . . . No child will fall through the cracks in our school."

And then she made an irresistible claim: "Every single one of our kindergartners in both schools is reading! Every single one! I don't get up here and say it unless it's true."

Kimlee Acosta, an employment agency worker and mother of two boys in the public schools, was sold. She found a pay phone and called her friend Christine Litaker, who was still at work. "You got to get down here," said Acosta. "It's freakin' great! They're going to start school at 8; they go to 3:30! My kids start school at freakin' quarter to 9." India Sloane, a home health aide with a daughter entering kindergarten, thought it sounded better than her local public school. "I'm going to apply her for this school," she said. "It have good qualifications for, you know, a child."

That night, hundreds of Jersey City parents signed up their children for a school that didn't have even a building or location yet, run by a company whose entire track record is two schools, each in existence for less than a year. The parents were willing to take the plunge, because while they didn't know fully what they were getting into, they knew they weren't pleased with what their children had.

Still, not everyone was converted. While Robert Silberman liked it, his wife, Karen, thought it sounded militaristic. "I guess we're having a disagreement," she said. And Sandra Oviedo has a son who's having problems with math in a school that uses a similar method. "It's not magic," she said. Even many parents eagerly signing on the dotted line were wondering if there really could be such a miraculous urban public school where every kindergartner reads.

THIS IS THE CUTTING EDGE OF THE SCHOOL-choice movement, and it is stunning to behold because it is so radically different from what has come before in public education, and at the same time so much in sync with this era, when the free market is entrusted to deliver the best public-policy choices for us all. In the new education marketplace, public schools are expected to sell themselves aggressively, and the burden of figuring out what is real and what is hype falls not on regulators or district bureaucrats or boards of education but on parents. During the question period at that April meeting, Carlos Garcia asked what kind of guarantees went with all the company's promises. "What happens if my child does fall by the wayside?" Garcia asked. "I'm having that now, in another charter school."

"You're asking what recourse you have if we don't do what we say," Madigan responded. "I don't have a good answer for you. If this school doesn't do it, you tell other people and we don't keep in business."

In short: Let the buyer beware.

Each new school year brings more charters, and that in turn is pressuring public schools to sell themselves harder. Since 1991, when Minnesota passed the first charter legislation, 32 other states, including New Jersey (but not New York), have followed suit, and there are currently 786 charter schoools in America, with 400 to 500 more expected this fall. They tend to be in big cities, but exist in suburbs and rural areas, too, varying enormously in philosophy and quality. While most are run on a nonprofit basis, started by parents and educators, there are also about a dozen for-profit charter companies, including Edison, the best known, which will have 48 schools by fall, and Advantage, which will have 7 or 8. The movement has attracted support across the spectrum, from conservative businessmen like Steven Wilson, a founder of Advantage, to liberal public educators like Deborah Meier, who created the widely admired Central Park East public school in Harlem in the 1970's and recently started her own charter in Boston.

In Jersey City alone — where six charters have been approved — there is one started by white yuppies and one by the Urban League. There are charters that stress basics, and there is the Learning Community charter, which uses the Bank Street model and has a principal who warns parents that there will be little homework and no textbooks. When Kiwan Fitch is asked what she likes about *that* charter, she mentions the time her kindergartner, Brandon, dissected a fish.

Anyone in New Jersey who wants to start one — parents, teachers, professors, businesspeople — submits a plan to the state. If the state approves, then that plan — the charter — becomes the blueprint for the school. A charter school is free and open to any child who lives within the public-school district where the charter school is located. Typically, too many children want to attend and a lottery is held.

Financing is all tax dollars, and that is where the competition comes in, where things turn nasty: nearly every dollar that goes to a charter is subtracted from that district's public schools. Jersey City public schools currently receive about $7,000 from the state and city for each child educated. When a charter opens, it receives most of that $7,000 per child enrolled and the public school loses that $7,000 per child. So Advantage's charter, with 500 students, would receive close to $3.5 million in public funds that would have otherwise gone to Jersey City public schools. The numbers make it easy to understand the hard sell at that April meeting. Every family could bring in at least $7,000 to Advantage Schools Inc.; Kimlee Acosta's two sons were worth a cool $14,000.

Nor are public-school districts sitting by quietly as their funds and motivated students are skimmed off. Of 23 new charters approved this year in New Jersey, 14 faced legal challenges, most claiming they were an unfair economic drain.

Supporters of school choice say that rather than being hurt, good public schools will rise to the market challenge and improve. And you can see some of that in Jersey City, at schools like P.S.16, where the principal and parents are also out selling their school hard. Fortunately, P.S. 16 has lots to sell: it's a small school in a handsome old building in a gentrifying neighborhood of brownstones, with a poor yet upwardly mobile immigrant population whose children have some of the city's best test scores.

Mornings at P.S. 16, before school, Bob DiTursi, the principal, leans out his window, joking with parents on the sidewalk below. "I'm drumming up business," he says, pulling his head inside. He is not kidding. He wants 40 kindergartners for next September, enough so he can have two small classes of 20 each. Last fall, he fell short of 40 and it cost him. When the citywide classroom census was completed last October, he had only 31 kindergartners; the district decided that wasn't enough to justify two teachers and took one away, merging the children into a single, large class. Since then, when parents considering P.S. 16 for next year have visited, they've been discouraged by that overcrowded kindergarten. The principal fears that these motivated parents — the ones whose children do best on the state tests that everyone follows in The Jersey Journal — will go elsewhere. And so he has been hunting kindergartners, visiting downtown high-rises to pitch parents. He also has been giving out zone waivers to middle-class

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Michael Winerip is a staff writer for the magazine.

families who prefer P.S. 16 to their neighborhood school, P.S. 9, one of the city's worst.

P.S. 16 has had help, too, from Charlotte Kreutz, though she doesn't even have a child there yet. Kreutz, a designer married to an architect, believes in supporting her local public school and wants to send her 4-year-old, Georgia, to P.S. 16 — if the kindergarten is not too large. In March, Kreutz created a flier that explained the kindergarten situation, titled "Consider P.S. 16, a Great School in Your Own Neighborhood!" She spent hours stuffing mailboxes and buttonholing parents. In this way, Kreutz lined up five families with children entering kindergarten who said they were leaning toward P.S. 16. Nothing is sure, however, as parents jockey on behalf of their children; several had their names in lotteries for charters, too. Even Kreutz was torn. "If Georgia's in a class of 30 kids, I'll be really unhappy. I don't know what I'll do. I don't want to be a bleeding-heart liberal making a point about public schools and sacrificing my child."

Every reform has limitations, and the problem with school choice is what happens to schools that have nothing to sell, schools left behind after the most-motivated families have made their choices and moved on. P.S. 39 is widely regarded as Jersey City's worst elementary school, a large, dark building at the end of a dead-end street surrounded by a 25-foot-high chain-link fence that makes it look like Riker's Island. The school has the city's lowest test scores and the most poor children, 94 percent qualifying for free lunches, many living on welfare in the Duncan Avenue projects. Midyear, the principal resigned. The week I visited, fights frequently broke out; the lunchroom was in chaos. The stereotype of bad inner-city schools is overcrowded classes, but so many parents work hard to get their children elsewhere — whether a charter, a Catholic school or, by using a fake address, a better public school — that at P.S. 39 average class size is actually small, 21.

At P.S. 39, in Laurie Ralph's third grade this year, a girl named Fathema often screamed, rolled on the floor like a dog and fought, making it impossible to accomplish anything some days. There were times the veteran teacher broke down crying. Fathema's mother, Peggy Smith, 30, says she doesn't know how to handle her daughter, either. One thing is certain: Smith won't be signing up her five children (three of them in special education) for a charter. She had never heard of charters. "I don't know too much about them," she says.

This year's Jersey City Teacher of the Year is from P.S. 39, Jerri O'Brien-Cass. She works long hours and learns about the personal problems her third graders face at home so she can help them better. For one boy who can't read and is failing, she sent home 17 notes requesting a parent conference — with no response. P.S. 39 is on the losing side of the school-choice debate, and it enrages the teacher of the year. "If my best students, my Schnelle and my Phillip, are going off to charter schools, God bless them — let them go if it gives them better lives," she says. "But that makes us like a prison. We'll be the Last Stop Incarceration Public School."

The answer from school choicers would be if P.S. 39 doesn't work, get rid of it and let the children of the Duncan Avenue projects choose among the city's best schools. In fact, Jersey City children can leave their neighborhood school and pick another if that other school's principal signs a waiver saying there is room. Unfortunately, most Jersey City schools are overcrowded, and schools in the more upscale neighborhoods are the most overcrowded. Those schools, which also have the top test scores, like P.S. 27, P.S. 38 and P.S. 6, average 30 in first grade. And Jersey City's Mayor, Bret Schundler, who is a national leader of the school-choice movement and regularly disparages his city's public schools ("They're a failure," he said), is not much help. While the state has tripled its annual aid to Jersey City schools in the last decade, the city's contribution has shrunk from $91 million in 1990 to $72 million this year. Schundler recently used his political clout ($34 million in city bonding power) not for public schools but to finance six new buildings to be occupied by charter schools.

This diversion of resources is public educators' worst fear and has so far kept charters out of New York. A push this spring to pass a charter bill by a coalition including the Republican Governor of New York, George Pataki, and Democratic legislators from heavily minority districts has been stalled by the association for public-school boards and the teachers' union, among others.

THE SCHOOL-CHOICE DEBATE IS MOST importantly about how to design an effective public system to educate poor children, as Deborah Meier, the progressive educator, argues in "The Power of Their Ideas." The middle and upper classes, she points out, have always enjoyed school choice. If they don't like their public school, they can choose a private school or move to a suburb. Indeed, in the 1960's and 70's, thousands of white ethnic Jersey City families exercised choice by moving to suburbia. Today, Jersey City, the state's second largest district, has 32,000 mainly minority children — a mix of Hispanics (38 percent) and African-Americans (41percent), along with immigrants. It is a place where several major reform efforts are going on at once, making it a good prism for viewing school choice. In 1989, the state took over Jersey City's public schools and still controls them, the longest-running takeover of a failing system in the nation. Of 39 charters approved in New Jersey since 1996, when the Republican Governor, Christine Todd Whitman, won passage of enabling legislation, Jersey City has 6, second only to Trenton.

Jersey City's Mayor Schundler has been a vocal school-choice advocate. He is a popular Republican in a Democratic city, a 39-year-old Harvard-educated bond salesman turned politician with a reputation as an urban reformer. The shift in Schundler's focus in recent years from vouchers to charters reflects a national switch by Republicans that has helped bring the choice movement into the mainstream.

In the early 1990's, Schundler's thrust was getting the state to approve publicly financed vouchers that children could use to attend Jersey City's Catholic schools (which have lost much of their white ethnic population) or other private schools. While vouchers have been opposed by most Democrats, teachers' unions and civil libertarians as a violation of the separation of church and state, the opposition of those groups did not count much in New Jersey by 1995. Republicans controlled the legislature and Governor's Mansion. Schundler was confident; a few states had passed pilot voucher programs. The Mayor looked to his ally, Governor Whitman, to lead the way.

He was hung out to dry. When forced to de-

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I asked the Mayor if he planned to send his daughter to the Advantage charter. No, he said, 'I like a big dollop of Christianity with my education.' But there were other reasons he wouldn't pick 'his' charter for his daughter. 'Those schools are best for certain children.'

clare themselves, the suburbanite Governor and suburbanite legislative leadership had no passion for vouchers. Their constituents didn't need vouchers — their suburban schools were first rate. And did they really want to raise taxes so inner city children could attend private schools? Trying to put the best light on it recently, the Mayor described it this way: "Whitman didn't push as hard as I thought. She feels complacency on this issue." Vouchers also would have aligned the party with the Christian right, an unpopular stand in a swing state like New Jersey.

Charters, on the other hand, were smack in line with mainstream Republicanism — market-driven, secular schools that required no tax increase. While Mayor Schundler still wants vouchers, he is now pushing charters — particularly "his" charter. The Advantage charter that so many parents signed up for that April night is known as "the Mayor's School." The Mayor hooked up with the for-profit Boston company; he is constructing a building with city bond money that will house the charter, at considerable savings to Advantage. So far, charter chains, including Edison, have not been profitable, but deals like this one could turn that around. Critics of the Mayor say he is doing everything possible to make "his" charter a success that he can show off if he runs for higher office.

That is not how the Mayor sees it. "I'm fighting for the kids; I'm fighting for the taxpayers," he says. "School choice is the civil rights struggle of this generation." Jersey City voters seem to agree. In April, all four on the Mayor's slate for the school board — not one of them with a child in public school — defeated a slate of candidates from the teachers' union that has long battled the Mayor over school choice.

The Mayor believes Advantage's approach, using constant drill and repetition, will work best "for children coming from less-advantaged homes. One problem these kids have is lack of confidence. They don't believe in their own potential. That discipline will be good for them. The teacher'll say: 'The Declaration of Independence was signed July 4, 1776. What day was the Declaration of Independence signed?' Disadvantaged children are shy to answer questions like this. This system doesn't allow children not to answer. The child gets used to his own voice, gets used to being told he's right. It's not that hard to give answers if someone just told you. They memorize back and know and get used to a lot of A's on quizzes. That may not be ideal in suburban Short Hills, but it's bringing a lot of value-added for our children." I asked the Mayor if he would send his daughter to the Advantage charter. She is 6 and attends a Christian school in Hoboken. No, he said, "I like a big dollop of Christianity with my education." But there were other reasons he wouldn't pick "his" charter for his daughter. "Those schools are best for certain children," he said.

ALL LATE WINTER AND SPRING, PARENTS feverishhly researched school options. Angela George, a worker at an import company, visited every charter, got a book from the library on how to evaluate a school and called the Board of Education for a copy of its first-grade curriculum. Barbara Jeski, a Polish immigrant and single mother who works in housekeeping at a Manhattan hotel, speaks little English and so toured the Learning Community charter with her neighbor from the apartment upstairs, Amanda Merlino. Merlino has been advising Jeski on her daughter Patricia's education and suggested the charter might be better because of the smaller classes, 16 versus 28 at P.S. 25. But when Merlino heard about the school's progressive ways, she wasn't so sure. "It was more yuppieish than we expected — there was this Chinese yup walking around with her nose in the air," she said of one parent. "But I kept quiet; I didn't say anything. I figure maybe this is an opportunity for Patricia to be around a better class of people, a mother and a father and both working. Maybe we have to do this for Patricia — she has to know how to associate with rich people."

That Chinese yup was actually Christel Factura, a Filipino who immigrated in the early 1990's and, like her husband, is a computer programmer. Factura was impressed with the charter's cheery rooms, the willingness of teachers to let children progress at their own rate. She wouldn't consider her local public school for her kindergartner, didn't know its name. And if her son wasn't picked in the lottery? "Probably move to the suburbs," she said.

Carolyn Brewington, a single woman raising a troubled friend's son, heard about Learning Community from a neighborhood hairdresser who has a child at the charter and recommends it to her customers with hyperactive boys. "The public school can't handle my Tré," said Brewington, an office manager's assistant. "Monday, an hour after I arrived at work, the aide calls: 'Tré's throwing rocks in the classroom.' I know he's not easy. He has trouble sitting at a desk all day." What caught her attention was the charters' attitude on discipline. "If a teacher's reading a lesson and a child is in the corner with his feet up not taking part, it's not considered a disciplinary problem as long as he's not disrupting the class," she said.

In the course of visiting charters, I spoke to hundreds of parents. What distinguishes them is their motivation. They are out hunting something extra for their children. School-choice advocates try to debunk the idea that charters are elitist. They point out that charters tend to have a higher percentage of poor and minority children than most American schools, and in a sense they are right. Even the most "yuppified" Jersey City charter, the Learning Community school, is impressively integrated with 43 percent of its children poor enough to qualify for free lunches — far more than in most suburbs. But, if you compare that charter to the Jersey City public-school district it competes with, the charter is skimming. The average Jersey City elementary school has 76 percent free lunches. In fact, all Jersey City's charters have fewer students qualifying for free lunches than an average Jersey City public school. Even the Advantage school in Rocky Mount, N.C., that Mayor Schundler says is so well equipped to serve Jersey City's poor, is skimming; 38 percent of its children qualify for free lunches versus 49 percent for Rocky Mount elementary schools.

This is common sense. The poorest, most troubled parents aren't running around looking for charters. The mother of the boy in O'Brien-Cass's third grade at P.S. 39, who hasn't answered 17 notes home, isn't shopping for charter schools. The family that P.S. 39's vice principal left school to help one March day because they were being evicted from the projects isn't shopping for charters. That is precisely one of the attractions of charters for motivated parents.

There are liberals who were surprised when articles began appearing about African-Americans in Democratic cities like Cleveland, Denver and Milwaukee joining Republicans to push for charters and vouchers. But parents like Tonia and Bobby Washington of Jersey City are part of a growing African-American middle class and simply want the best for their three girls. The Washingtons are no more worried about the implications of charters creaming off top students from public schools than whites were a generation ago when they moved to suburbia.

The Washingtons rarely see each other during the week. He works a day shift at the post office, and after he gets home, she leaves for the night shift at Newark Airport, servicing jets. That is the sacrifice they make for their children; they do not hire a baby sitter, partly to save money but more because they want to raise the girls themselves. Most mornings, on a few hours' sleep, Tonia walks their oldest, Sunaya, to P.S. 20, leading her in and watching her take her seat in her first-grade classroom. Afternoons, before work, she walks Sunaya home.

In February, the Washingtons put Sunaya's name on the waiting list for the Learning Community's first grade, in case a midyear opening came up. They also entered her in the lottery for next fall's second grade. It's not that the mother thinks the public schools are so bad. In fact, when her husband said, "They're not what they used to be when I——," she interrupted: "That's not true, Bobby. They're getting better. I saw test scores in the paper." In the nine years after the state takeover, P.S. 20 went from 68 to 85 percent of eighth graders' passing the state competency test. "They're getting reading from that test," says Tonia. "The children will be up to standards. They keep taking and taking the test until they get it right." She's pleased with her daughter's progress. "She reads well; she writes very legibly. Her math skills are excellent." So why pursue a charter? "Just too many children at P.S. 20." It averages 28 in first grade. "Kids get neglected," she says.

Every week this spring, she called the charter principal, Michael Weinberg, to see if there was an opening. "I understand from Mr. Weinberg a family may be going to Florida," she said. "They keep saying the family hasn't moved yet." The Washingtons are Democrats — "the party for the working people," says Bobby — but vote for the Republican Mayor. "I like his ideas," he adds. "What they need is more charter schools around here."

SCHOOL CHOICE IS NOT ENTIRELY NEW. IN the 1970's, public schools known as magnets offered enrichment programs as an incentive to pull children from neighborhood schools. Originally, magnets were a way to improve racial balance voluntarily, but over time these schools became a place for smart educators to try new ideas. New York City's District 4, which includes East Harlem, is the best-known example of school choice relying on magnets. Still, magnet schools are ultimately controlled by a district's central office. If the Chancellor decides that New York's small magnet high schools should have larger class sizes, he can order it. A magnet is like a corporate subsidiary. A charter is like having your own business. Deborah Meier left New York to start a school in Boston because she felt the charter model offered more freedom for reform.

The best argument for choice is the schools created. At their finest, they are gems that challenge people to rethink public education. In "Miracle in East Harlem," Seymour Fliegel, a former New York City school administrator now at the Manhattan Institute, a conservative think tank, makes the point that when educators create their own school, they have a sense of ownership that energizes a whole building. Bobby Washington, the Jersey City postal worker, noticed it, too: "I walk into the public school, I see people doing a job; the charter is a mission."

Libby McDonald is an unusually creative woman, an Ivy League-educated writer and filmmaker, married to a lawyer, with a 4-year-old, Matilda, who is beginning to read and speaks Russian with her nanny and dad. In 1995, McDonald decided to start a charter. She spent months researching, took inspiration from Meier's school and on a February night invited over a few friends to discuss the idea. "Forty showed up — that's how hungry people were," she says. Over the next two years she put in many 40- to 60-hour weeks, all voluntary, laying the groundwork. When parents needed $2,000 to advertise for a director, they held a potluck dinner. Seventy people donated much of the summer of 1997, turning part of the local Boys Club into the Learning Community school.

The first six months that the school was opened, the six teachers were absent a total of two days. In Debra Wittig's kindergarten, the 15 students spend their time in creative play. It is often noisy, but Wittig does not raise her voice. "Brandon," she says, "you may not scream in Philip's face." Wittig reads to them a lot, and they are constantly looking through books, but the education process is subtle, indirect. At one point, five girls sit in a circle taking turns holding the class rabbit for one minute each, passing it to the next person after they've counted to 60. During the spring rains, they were fascinated by worms washing out of the ground, so Wittig created a worm unit. "We had serious worm frenzy," she says. All over the room were charts of worm parts, giant papier-mâché worms, worm stories written in "creative" spelling that is incomprehensible to a visitor. When I ask Wittig how many of her kindergartners read, she says, "Maybe 8 of 15."

Perhaps the most striking thing about charters is how, with smaller budgets than public districts — they get no capital funds — several have created schools with 15 or 16 in a class. It is the thing parents mention first. Most charters do this by paying teachers below union wage (a key reason teachers' unions are lukewarm to charters). The Learning Community charter hired young teachers for $28,000 to $30,000, while the average Jersey City public school teacher has 18 years' experience and makes $65,650.

But there is a Jersey City charter, Soaring Heights, that pays union scale — a veteran kindergarten teacher, Joan Incognito, makes $67,800 — *and* has 16 per class. "We started with those two premises," says the dean, Nancy Lomba. "Everything else we just had to make do." Part of school choice is allocating scarce resources, as a comparison between Soaring Heights (85 children in kindergarten through fourth grade) and P.S. 42 (167 in the same grades) makes clear:

P.S. 42 pays $224,000 to rent commercial space, plus $95,000 to three janitors and $23,751 for a security guard. The charter rents shared space in a church for $59,000, which includes cleaning and a buzzer security system. P.S. 42 has a teacher for gifted students ($41,700), a librarian ($75,600), three teachers' assistants (at $17,000 apiece) and an English-as-second-language teacher ($45,000). Twice a week, it has a music teacher ($34,500), art teacher ($28,000) and guidance counselor ($37,500). The charter has none of those. The charter has no playground or gym; kids play in the parking lot. It has no cafeteria; children eat at their desks. On the other hand, P.S. 42 has 31 in second grade, 25 in first and third — while the charter limits classes to 16.

The opening of so many charters so quickly highlights how slow public systems are to adapt and how their budgeting process contributes to the lethargy. The capital budget for building a new Jersey City public school is totally separate from the operating budget. At P.S. 3, parents have been forming committees for 20 years to design a new school. The latest version calls for dividing P.S. 3 into a two-school complex with a 50-meter pool, two gyms, three ballfields, two libraries and two auditoriums — at a cost of $40 million. When I asked Jersey City's Superintendent, Richard DiPatri, if it wouldn't be smarter to build a more modest school and use the savings to reduce class size, he says, "Parents want palaces." If P.S. 3 ever gets built (the more it costs, the less likely that is), it would in all probability become the most overcrowed palace in the city. That distinction now belongs

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to P.S. 17, opened in 1996 at a cost of $21 million, with the city's largest class size, an average of 30.

APRIL 3 WAS THE LOTTERY FOR Learning Community, the "yup charter." Eighty parents had applied for 20 slots, and while the children picking numbered Ping-Pong balls from a box were cute, people were too tense to notice. When Carol Lester's number was called, she pumped her fist and gasped, "Yes!" The Washingtons' daughter, Sunaya, didn't make it, and they weren't sure what to do next year. Christel Factura's son didn't either. "We are going to find a place in the suburbs," she said.

The news was mostly bad for Charlotte Kreutz, the mother who had worked so hard to recruit kids for P.S. 16's kindergarten. Two of the five families she was counting on were sending their kids to the charter. The rest were making other plans. "It dropped to just me. I was feeling kind of isolated, a little panicky." But she was sticking to her plan, though she wouldn't know the class size till fall. She sat in on P.S 16's kindergarten and was impressed with the teacher, even with so many kids. "The kids seemed very attentive," said Kreutz. "She has a beautiful singing voice — all of a sudden she broke into this lush soprano. The nursery school where Georgia is now, the teacher is tonedeaf."

The charter was no longer an option for Carolyn Brewington's first grader, Tré. He wasn't reading, and his behavior was worse. "He was suspended from school for two days. He and a class member were passing a knife." She asked P.S. 14's child-study team to screen him for special education. "One of the main incentives to keep Tré in public school," she said, "they give extra help."

THERE ARE GREAT BENEFITS FOR the reform of the moment, including the ability to attract new talent and money. The Clinton Administration, always quick to jump on a popular Republican idea, has been giving grants of up to $100,000 to charters to hire community outreach staffs to attract students.

But even in the glow of newness, problems have surfaced in Jersey City. Small schools are most reformers' goal, but can be fragile, held together by a few people. In December, Gateway, a small Jersey City charter, suddenly had three of its four staff members, including the principal, quit in a dispute. State officials supposedly overseeing charters were caught off guard; a monitoring team had yet to visit the school. Midyear, parents had to decide: stick it out or jump ship?

Charters are public institutions run by private groups. Will they keep themselves open to scrutiny when they have problems? I had scheduled an interview with Silvana Mazzella, a leader of ACORN, a community group granted a charter to open a school for 150 students. She stood me up and did not return dozens of phone messages. Finally, a director of another charter told me there were problems; the school would not open this year.

While there's evidence school choice can produce positive results, it's hard to say whether it's better than the many other reform efforts. New York City's District 4 (by creating an extensive magnet system) and the state effort in Jersey City (by installing state officials at the top to remake a corrupt system) have taken different routes yet seem to have produced similar results. A recent study by Paul Teske and Mark Schneider evaluating test scores in District 4 notes considerable improvement since school choice was implemented. The study concludes that District 4 is performing significantly better than other districts with similar demographics but no choice. It points out that test scores improved even at District 4's neighborhood schools.

As for Jersey City, since the state takeover, its elementary test scores have gone from the middle of the pack among the state's dozen largest, poorest districts to No. 2; 79.6 percent of Jersey City eighth graders passed the state's reading test in 1997, compared with 56 percent in 1991. And all its bottom schools, with one exception (P.S. 39), have improved scores, too. State officials have achieved this by letting principals control the hiring of teaching staff as well as giving them more say in their budgets. (Before the takeover, a crony of a former mayor, who was promoted from gym teacher to assistant superintendent, assigned teachers to schools depending on whom they'd supported in the election.) The state has added public-school pre-K classes and all-day kindergarten, and introduced Reading Recovery, a highly regarded national intensive remedial program. And when principals don't get results, they are gone. Citing the test scores and reforms, Whitman has pronounced the state takeover in Jersey City a success.

Of course, it is also possible to reach the opposite conclusion, as does Mayor Schundler, calling the takeover "a total failure." When Jersey City — or East Harlem — is compared with suburbs and the rest of the state, the results are abysmal. Of 455 districts in the state, Jersey City eighth graders rank 439th in reading scores. And while their test scores are climbing, everyone's have climbed since the eighth-grade test was introduced in 1991. As the market ethos has taken hold, parents and politicians have increasingly demanded school accountability, and by that they mean better test results.

Schools are devoting more time teaching to the test, creating curriculums that prepare kids for the tests.

And this will intensify as charters spread. Now charters are making hay off parent concerns about test results in big cities. Soon charters will feel that heat. The Advantage school in Rocky Mount isn't a year old, and already Cheryl Ellis, an administrator, is being pressured to include prep units for North Carolina's competency test. "It makes me want to throw up," she said. "We're all being measured by the test, the test, the test."

During an interview, DiPatri, the Superintendent appointed by Whitman to run Jersey City schools, mentioned test scores right away. "Ten years ago, Jersey City was at the bottom," he said. "Now we're far above all the other big ones, except Union City." Later, when I checked old scores, I realized Jersey City never was at the bottom; depending on which big districts you used for comparison, it was in the middle of the pack, or as high as fourth at the time of takeover. After discussing this with DiPatri's executive assistant, Joanne Kenny, she said: "I agree. We like to put our own spin on it." The flip side of school choice is test spin.

Theodore Sizer, founder of the Coalition of Essential Schools, has tried to move educators away from assessment based on tests and toward more complex methods like portfolios that show a range of a child's work and creativity. He points out that test scores correlate most closely with social class: "If you look at a lot of test scores, they match family income." Indeed, after nine years of state takeover in Jersey City, with all the innovations, if you look at the test results for the 27 elementary schools, the school with the most middle-class kids, P.S. 27 (63 percent free lunches), is at the top, and the poorest school, P.S. 39 (94 percent free lunches), is at the bottom. And there is considerable correlation: the more free lunches, the lower the test scores. The exceptions are schools like P.S. 16 (84 percent free lunches) dominated by immigrants. While poor in this country, they often came from middle-class backgrounds in their homelands.

When I asked to meet a top eighth grader at P.S. 39 — a predominantly African-American school with many second-generation welfare families — the guidance counselor introduced me to Edward Adu Jr. Edward's family immigrated to Jersey City two years ago from Africa. He is the P.S. 39 valedictorian and the only child accepted to attend Academic High next year, Jersey City's elite high school. In Ghana, his father was a skilled mechanic, and Edward attended a private school where he took 13 subjects a day, learning English and several other languages on top of his native Twi. He knows little of America beyond P.S. 39; while he has stood on Jersey City's docks and looked across the Hudson to Manhattan's skyscrapers, he has never visited there. When asked what has surprised him about America, he says, "It seems the schools in Africa are better than here."

One night, three hours into a Jersey City school-board meeting full of squabbles, the complexity of school reform suddenly hit me smack in the ears. An angry parent was screaming at the Superintendent: "Since you came in '89, our test scores has gone nowhere! What are you planning to do, Mr. DiPatri, to bring our children's test scores up? I don't see no improvement, no improvement at all!"

The sales pitch that accompanies school choice dazzles, promising to deliver more, better, sooner, when the reality is that education is an intricate process filled with subtle challenges like how to foster curiosity. When I asked Robert Slavin of Johns Hopkins, Grover Whitehurst of Stony Brook and Courtney Cazden of Harvard whether that Rocky Mount charter really could have all its kindergartners reading, the experts answered me with questions. What did the school mean by reading? Learning the phonetic code? Comprehending words being sounded out? Basic literacy? Developing a lifelong love for books? Slavin, whose own direct-instruction reading method, "Success for All," is used in 750 schools, questioned whether it was even desirable to push all kindergartners to read. If a child's too young, he asked, will that child be frustrated and turn off?

IN MAY, I FLEW TO ROCKY MOUNT to see the school where every kindergartner could read, opened last fall in a vacant J.C. Penney. Advantage had done a lovely remodeling job, painting the rooms white with muted green and purple trim. Students wore uniforms and did indeed fold their hands as they walked the halls. The school has been well received; 900 have signed up for 690 slots.

Shortly after greeting me, Joshua Solomon, Advantage's spokesman who had flown from corporate headquarters in Boston to escort me, said, "All the kindergarten kids read, you know."

Everything is taught straight from workbooks developed by the Engelmann Becker company. So while classes are large — 30 in most grades — they can be broken into groups taught by anyone, since all the instructor is doing, anyway, is reading straight from the text. In fact, 15 fifth graders in a top math group are taught by Colleen Burnham, the school receptionist. "All you have to remember," she said, "is you can't go off the script."

I mentioned to Ellis, the school's

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curriculum coordinator, that I had heard students were reading the "Iliad" and "Odyssey." "Actually," she says, "we didn't get to that this year." I asked if all 96 kindergartners were reading. "Actually we have six that aren't," she said. "We pull them out for extra help." Still, 90 of 96 reading sounded good.

During the morning, there is no play in kindergarten. They sit in groups for a half-hour each of reading, math and language-arts drill, and in between work independently, filling in blanks on work sheets. I've never seen such a quiet kindergarten. In math group, the teacher says: "87 minus 1 equals 86. Everyone what's the answer?" and snaps her fingers.

"87 minus 1 equals 86," they chant.

"49 minus 1 is 48. Everyone what's the answer?" [*snap*]

"48."

"Christopher, 43 minus 1, what's the answer?" [*snap*]

"88," says Christopher.

"Again, 43 minus 1 is [*snap*] 42. 43 minus 1, what's the answer Christopher?"

"42."

I asked the teacher, Christine Marsh, if she would allow a few to read to me. I'd brought my own beginning books; I wanted to know if they could read something basic they'd never seen. I requested readers from the lower groups. The first boy looked at the first line of "The Haunted House": "I am a ghostie." He couldn't even read "I." Marsh went to the second line looking for a word he would know and pointed to "the." The boy said, "T." "I'm surprised," Marsh said. "That was one of the first words we learned."

I handed the second boy "Raindrops." The first page says, "Drip, drip, drop." He couldn't read it. The teacher gave him hints about the pictures of rain falling. Finally for "Drip, drip, drop," the boy guessed, "Rain, drop ... no, I don't know."

After many prods from the teacher, the next child, a girl, in agonizingly slow fashion, sounded out "Drip, drip, drop." After more hints on the next page — "Rain is falling on my house" — she got "Rain is," but could not get "falling," "my" or "house." She was a tiny girl, and it was touching to see how mightily she worked at it and how much her teacher wanted her to read.

Like kindergarten teachers all over America, at the start of this day Marsh had written on the board: "Good morning. Today is Monday. The date is May 11, 1998." I asked, if she changed "Good morning" to "Good afternoon," how many could read it. "Maybe half," she said. ■

U. S. News & World Report, April 7, 1998

The New Education Bazaar

Charter schools represent the free market in action—with all its problems

By Thomas Toch

David Mackey liked the idea of running his own school. So last year he got a franchise to open a branch of Life School College Preparatory, a new kind of "public" school. The company holds a charter to educate Arizona kids with public funds outside the regular school system and offers franchises to operators for a fee of $1,000 per student. Now Mackey, who once taught public school in Utah and worked as education curator at a Phoenix firefighting museum, teaches math, science, history, and English to two dozen students, grades seven through 12, in a small room in a single-story, downtown professional building in Mesa, Ariz. He had to recruit the students himself, and if his enrollment drops, so does his $40,000 income—each student brings about $4,500 in state funding. The founder of Life School, James Alverson, a former public school teacher himself, says he borrowed the single-person franchise idea from Amway, the home-products distributor.

Until recently, the notion of maximizing profits and creating incentive schemes had little to do with running a public school. But Mackey and hundreds of other charter-school operators like him around the country are part of a bold new experiment in education reform. For over a century, local school boards have held a tight monopoly on where and how students can receive schooling at public expense. But deepening dissatisfaction with traditional public schools has changed the landscape. Conservative thinkers have long argued that public schools would do a better job if they had to compete for customers, as private firms do. Now, a hybrid "free market" system, in which students and parents exercise choice but the public pays the costs, is becoming a reality.

Since 1988, 16 states have passed "school choice" laws granting students permission to attend schools beyond the geographic borders of their local school districts tuition free. More than 4,000 "magnet" schools allow students to select schools with special teaching or curriculum themes within their school systems. And six years after the first charter school opened in Minnesota, there are nearly 800 such independent public schools educating more than 165,000 students in 23 states and the District of Columbia.

Of all these free-market reforms, charters have attracted particular interest because they represent the most dramatic departure from traditional schooling. Proponents of charter schools include both political conservatives—who view them as a step toward a more radically demonopolized system in which students would receive vouchers to attend public, private, or parochial schools—and moderates who see charters as a way of averting precisely this dramatic step. Both groups believe that charter schools, which in their purest form operate largely beyond the reach of school boards and teachers' unions, can strengthen public education by promoting competition and by liberating innovators from the shackles of tradition. President Clinton, a strong backer of the charter concept, has called for quadrupling the number of charter schools to 3,000 within the next two years.

In two states, Arizona and Michigan, the notion of a free-market school system has moved well beyond the theoretical stage. Charter laws in both states are the most permissive in the nation: Virtually any person or organization can open a charter school and enjoy wide latitude over staffing, curriculum, and spending, and the backing of the state lawmakers and regulators. Together, Arizona's 241 charters and Michigan's 107 make up nearly half the total number of charters in the United States.

Good and bad. Yet weeks of reporting in the two states, including visits to nearly three dozen charter schools, yield a picture of educational entrepreneurialism that features not only the the classic benefits of any market-based enterprise but also the classic drawbacks. Charter schools are both better and worse than ordinary public schools. Their problems are *different*, having more to do with those of a free-wheeling market than a state bureaucracy. The best charter schools pursue innovation and educational excellence with an enthusiasm sorely lacking in many traditional public schools. But these schools are the minority. Much more common are schools beset with problems as bad as—and in some cases worse than—those found in traditional public schools. If competition and market models are inevitable features of tomorrow's education, the operating realities of charter schools in Arizona and Michigan are reminders of perils to avoid—and guideposts for parents seeking the right schools for their children.

High-quality charter schools share one trait: They have brought new participants who care about children's welfare into public education. A dozen or so Detroit-area clergy, for instance, have started charters to help students languishing in the city's public schools. Charter schools are also generally small and safe, offering a cohesiveness hard to find in Arizona's and Michigan's often large public schools.

Charter schools in both states offer a wider variety of options for students with different learning styles. The teaching philosophies of two charters in Mesa, Ariz., for example, couldn't offer a more striking contrast: Benjamin Franklin Charter School is a throwback to Norman Rockwell schools of the 1950s, with well-scrubbed students working silently at desks in tidy rows, under the watchful eye of no-nonsense teachers. Several miles away at the Montessori Education Centre Charter School, elementary students grouped three grades to a room sprawl on the floor or bunch together at tables, learning math by grouping beads and working on sound-letter relationships, or drawing in their journals. When they need help, they call their teachers by their first names.

A few schools in both states are truly innovative. In Michigan, a secondary school created by the Ford Motor Co. is located in the Henry Ford Museum in Dearborn. Students study the museum's technology exhibits as part of the curriculum. A smattering of new schools have established themselves as specialized educational powerhouses, including Sankofa Shule, an Afrocentric elementary school in Lansing, Mich., that includes instruction in four languages, and the Arizona School for the Arts, a junior/senior high school in Phoenix that couples a half-day performing-arts program with a college-prep core curriculum.

Most fundamentally, the spread of charters in Arizona and Michigan proves that competition can promote reform. So far, the Mesa school system, Arizona's largest, has lost only 1,600 of its 70,000 students to the area's many charter schools. But the mere existence of the schools seems to have motivated the mainstream bureaucracy. To stanch the flow of students to the likes of Ben Franklin and the Education Centre, the district is opening new traditional and Montessori elementary schools, building a performing-arts magnet school, and adding daylong kindergartens to many elementary schools to court working parents.

If the best of a newly marketized system is very good, however, the worst has problems rarely encountered in traditional public education. And in scores of charters in Arizona and Michigan, curricula and teaching are weak, buildings are substandard, and financial abuses are surprisingly prevalent. Nearly half Arizona's charters are high schools, the majority run by chains such as PPEP TEC High School, Excel Education Centers Inc., and the Leona Group. These companies take advantage of the fact that Arizona requires high school students to attend only four hours of school a day. They target kids on the margins of traditional public schools—low achievers, discipline problems, truants—with pledges of swift and simple routes to graduation. And many of the companies increase their revenues by running two or three four-hour sessions a day and substituting self-paced computer instruction for a regular teaching staff.

Academic standards in such "high schools"—many occupy a few rooms in commercial buildings—are often very low. Marilynn Henley, Arizona's curriculum director in the mid-'90s, who last year visited more than 100 of the state's charter schools, calls the computer coursework "work sheets on screens—mostly at a seventh- or eighth-grade level." Many "courses" last only a few weeks. There is typically no homework. And many students get credits for after-school work, including, in the case of students at the Arizona Career Academy, a nonprofit charter in Tempe, jobs in fast-food restaurants.

Standards in many of Arizona's for-profit charter high schools with conventionally taught courses aren't any higher. At the Leona Group's new Apache Trail High School in Apache Junction, where staffers are paid bonuses for raising enrollment, 30 students taking a course called "American literature through cinema" listened (with the exception of those asleep at their desks) to the soundtrack from *Last of the Mohicans*. Defenders of the charter high schools say the schools offer a second chance to students abandoned by traditional public education.

Hard to learn. No one would dispute that bad teaching and scarce resources plague many traditional public schools. But shortages are so severe in some charter schools in Arizona and Michigan that it's hard to see how any learning can take place. Many of the charters' teachers are low-paid neophytes; as a result, staff turnover is high. Labs and libraries are rare. Even basic classroom supplies are often lacking: The kindergarten teacher at Eco-Tech Agricultural Charter School in Chandler, Ariz., for example, appeared to have little more than paper and pencils available for her students. And there are plenty of charter schools housed in buildings few would deem conducive to learning: Teachers at the West Michigan Academy of Environmental Sciences spent more than a year teaching 300 students at picnic tables and old desks in the Stadium Arena in Grand Rapids, briefly vacating the building for a knife-and-gun show.

Even more disturbing is the opportunity for profiteering created by charter laws in Arizona and Michigan. When William and Mary Delaney turned Warwick Pointe Academy, a private elementary school they owned and operated in Grand Blanc, Mich., into a public charter school in 1996, they began charging the school $200,000 a year in rent for the building and furnishings—over three times the per-foot rate paid by several public schools and another charter school in the area. William Delaney declined to discuss the rent.

A study of Arizona's charters conducted last year turned up a number of instances where the enrollments schools submitted to claim state aid differed sharply from the schools' average attendance. In Michigan, the Romulus public school system sought to profit from another market reform—the state's new school-choice law. Located just west of Detroit, the Romulus system opened a school within the Detroit school district's borders. It enrolled about 2,200 students, including many dropouts, offering as one attraction a $50 "signing bonus." The school qualified for $14 million in state aid, but only about a fifth of the students continued to attend the school. (Last year, the Michigan legislature outlawed such practices in Detroit, causing the school to close.)

Traditional public school systems have the ability to grant charters in Arizona. Most of those that have done so, however, have been tiny, cash-strapped rural school systems out to make money by charging chartering fees of up to 10 percent of the charter schools' revenues. The Arizona charter law also let sponsoring school systems count charter students as their own for state-aid purposes, a since-rescinded double-dipping opportunity that gave the 3,300-student Window Rock school district, located on the Navajo Indian reservation in northeast Arizona, an added $200,000 to a budget of $20 million.

Nepotism is widespread in Arizona and Michigan charter schools. One example is NFL-YET Academy, a 620-student elementary school in Phoenix. The school's founder and chief executive is Armando Ruiz, a former state senator and adviser to former Gov. Fife Symington. His twin brother, Fernando, is the school's budget director; his younger brother Reyes is the school's "spiritual development" director; his mother, Estella, is an administrator; his father, Reyes Sr., is a school carpenter; his sister, Rebecca, is a teacher. While the family-run model is ideal for many small businesses, the potential for abuse in public contracting is obvious; the law in Arizona bans nepotism in regular public schools but not in charter schools.

Such problems have multiplied in the absence of rigorous oversight. "We have not found a single [state] with a well-formed plan for dealing with problem schools or outright failures," write conservative education expert Chester Finn Jr. and his coauthors in their 1997 report, "Charter Schools in Action." Local school systems have largely sidestepped the task of monitoring the 50 or so charter schools they sponsor in Arizona. Window Rock, for instance, hasn't assigned any staff to keep tabs on the dozen schools it has chartered, the closest of which is 400 miles away. Window Rock's new school superintendent, Paul Hanley, did move to close four schools last fall, including two run by Reed Gaddie, who in 1989 was sentenced to jail on a drug paraphernalia charge. One of Gaddie's schools, Community Campus, had no building and was conducting classes in a park; the other, the Arizona Career and Technology High School, on one occasion last fall resorted to "locking down" students in their classrooms with custodians and construction workers patrolling the halls to keep order.

State chartering boards haven't been eager to crack down on abuses, either. Last year's evaluation of Arizona's charter schools was conducted by the staff of Lisa Graham Keegan, Arizona's elected state superintendent of schools, after Keegan's office began receiving many complaints about the schools. But Keegan's department didn't make the evaluation's troubling findings public until nearly a year later—after the state school board association lawyer filed a freedom-of-information request, and after Keegan's top charter-school aide removed evaluators' handwritten notes on their school visits, as allowed by law. Says Keegan about the evaluators' report: "I would prefer that everything [the monitors] saw was wonderful. But if it wasn't, OK. In the main, I'm pleased, far and away, with the quality of the public charter schools. . . . How much monitoring do you think is going on in the traditional system?"

Two governor-appointed boards that grant charters in Arizona, the State Board of Education and the State Board for Charter Schools, also declined to take action against many schools discovered during the evaluation to have serious educational problems. The boards, dominated by free-market advocates, revoked two charters in the wake of the evaluation, including that of Alan Wright, a past superintendent of education at the Arizona Department of Juvenile Corrections, who recruited many students from the state's youth justice system to his 12 Success charter schools. The state said Wright failed to serve special-education students and committed other transgressions, which he denied. (A state court recently reinstated Wright's charter on due-process grounds, though the Success schools have shut down.)

But over three dozen schools in last year's evaluation of Arizona's charters that were identified as having education programs bad enough to close were left alone on the grounds that they weren't physically endangering students or defrauding taxpayers. The systematic evaluation of the charter schools by Keegan's staff ended last fall, halted by the heads of the two charter boards and Keegan, a former speech pathologist who entered the Arizona legislature at age 30 and coauthored the state's charter law after failing to push through voucher legislation. Through a spokesperson, they say that the Arizona Department of Education is not required by law to conduct charter-school evaluations.

No furniture. In Michigan, the majority of charter schools are sponsored by state universities: Central Michigan University, Grand Valley State, Saginaw Valley State, and a few others, all of whose boards of trustees were appointed by Republican Gov. John Engler. Engler is a staunch advocate of charters who readily acknowledges that he pressed trustees to promote charter schools. Instead of closing down a severely troubled school in Muskegon, the head of the charter-school office at Grand Valley served as the school's interim principal for several weeks. Harry Ross, director of oversight at Central Michigan's charter-school office, says the university had nearly 30 charter schools in operation before it hired oversight staff.

Keegan and other market-reform advocates argue that it is consumers—parents and students—who should determine the fate of charter schools. "If the education in charter schools isn't good, people leave, and the schools don't stay in business. It's a better way to run a system," she says. Yet neither Arizona nor Michigan incorporates testing systems to measure whether charter students are learning any more than their counterparts in regular public schools—making it difficult for parents and students to make smart choices.

In fact, the choices may be fewer than many consumers realize: Though funded with tax revenues, many charters have proved less welcoming than truly "public" schools. To be eligible for federal start-up grants, the schools must be open to any student who applies and must use a lottery if they are oversubscribed. But Arizona doesn't require charters to use a lottery, and some schools that have received federal funds don't. The well-regarded New School for the Arts in Scottsdale, for example, has a lengthy waiting list. Yet it considers applicants on a first-to-apply basis and then counsels out students not suited to its advanced arts program.

Some charter schools discourage special-needs students from applying. Lyle Voskuil, director of special education at eight Grand Rapids area charters run by National Heritage Academies, a for-profit company, says that for financial reasons his schools offer no more than three hours of special-ed services to a student a week and that they urge the parents of students who need more help not to attend the schools. "We tell them upfront that they may be better off elsewhere," says Voskuil. Traditional public schools don't have that luxury.

Bad apples. Arizona's charter high school chains may recruit troubled students, but other charter operators work to keep such students out. Many have "zero tolerance" discipline policies that they discuss in long, preadmission interviews with parents and students as a way to discourage potential bad apples. "We're trying to get our share of good kids," says Japen Hollist of Life School in Mesa. "We've raised the dress code to scare off a few, and we have frank conversations with others."

Twenty percent of Arizona's charter schools and nearly half the charters in Michigan are former private schools that converted to charter status—frequently as a way to raise their revenues. Many of these "conversion" schools—including some 20 Montessori schools in Arizona and two prestigious private schools in Detroit, Nataki Talibah Schoolhouse and Aisha Shule—have created more options for families who couldn't otherwise afford private schooling. But to the extent that such schools don't open their doors to "outsiders," charter laws are simply creating public subsidies for private schooling, and encouraging social balkanization. The A.G.B.U. Alex and Marie Manoogian School in Southfield, Mich., for example, was a private Armenian church school before it became a charter two years ago (tripling its revenue in the process). As a charter school, its board, faculty, and student body are still almost entirely Armenian. "Not a lot of new kids apply," acknowledges principal Nadya Sarafian, who keeps small U.S. and Armenian flags side by side on her desk.

Nowhere are the separatist tendencies of some charter schools more strongly reflected than at Sankofa Shule, one of half a dozen African-centered charters in Michigan. While its students clearly thrive in a setting celebrating their heritage, Sankofa deliberately places itself outside the cultural mainstream. Rather than Labor Day, Memorial Day, and Presidents' Day, it observes holidays such as African Independence Day and Malcolm X Remembrance Day. "The traditional concept of Thanksgiving, like the Fourth of July, really has nothing to do with us," writes a teacher in the school newsletter. And a daily "affirmation" spoken by the entire school begins, "I pledge to my African nation . . . ."

The segregation of many charter schools along ethnic, racial, and religious lines has also created church-state conflicts. A year after Heritage Academy Inc., a privately run Mesa high school, converted to charter status, the *Arizona Republic* reported that the school was teaching creationism in its science classes—and violating the law in the process. The school's headmaster at first defended the practice. Later, faced with the loss of state funding, he vowed instead to teach neither creationism nor evolution.

Keegan and other charter backers contend that charter schools shouldn't be held to higher standards than traditional public schools. Yet charter schools offer a chance to introduce a level of accountability absent from public education in the past. For decades, public schools have been at the mercy of central-office edicts and teacher-union contracts—and thus not responsible for their own performance. They were told what to spend money on, whom to hire, and what to teach. Many charter schools, in contrast, are largely free of such bureaucracy. In exchange for that freedom, it would make sense to allow public authorities to scrutinize charters' financial practices and educational results—and to crack down on laggards. Such a trade-off could in turn inspire a similarly rigorous system of accountability in traditional public schools. What *is* clear from the Arizona and Michigan experiences with charters is that, without rigorous accountability, both students and taxpayers suffer. ■

The Center for Market-Based Education, April 28, 1998

This letter is in response to the April 27, US News & World Report concerning charter schools in Arizona and Michigan

TO: Members, Arizona State Legislature
Charter Friends
Arizona Charter School Operators
Arizona Media Outlets
State-Based Think Tanks
Charter School Resource Centers

FROM: Mary Gifford, Director, Center for Market-Based Education

SUBJ: US News and World Report Article (April 27, 1998)

DATE: April 28, 1998

US News and World Report published a story on charter schools in Arizona and Michigan. The reporter, Tom Toch, spent time in Arizona and visited a handful of our charter schools. His article contains several inaccuracies as well as several misleading statements. We hope the following information is helpful in sorting through the issues surrounding charter schools in Arizona. We look forward to your comments.

Charter School "Experiment" and "Free-Market Reforms"

Mr. Toch calls charter schools part of an education "experiment." Charter schools in Arizona are certainly not part of an "experiment." Charter schools in Arizona were created with very specific, and statutorily mandated, goals: increase parental choice and enhance pupil achievement. Mr. Toch further confuses the charter school concept by lumping together "free-market reforms," such as "magnet" programs, and charter schools. Magnet schools did not develop because of a need for additional parent choice as did charter schools.

"Any person or organization can operate a charter school."

Mr. Toch says that, "in Arizona and Michigan virtually any person or organization can open a charter school." This is blatantly incorrect. Any person or organization may *apply* to operate a charter school. Only the most qualified applicants actually receive charters and operate charter schools.

Measuring Success and Efficacy of Charter Schools

Mr. Toch contradicted himself when he described a lack of testing to adequately judge the success of a charter school, yet he concluded that effective charter schools are in the minority. He is also wrong on the point of an absence of testing in Arizona charter schools. Arizona's charter schools are required by law to participate in the state's annual norm-referenced test (Stanford 9) and the upcoming state criterion-referenced test (AIMS). Additionally, Arizona charter schools' curriculum must be aligned with the state's academic standards. Further, charter schools must meet the state's graduation and seat time requirements. These requirements are the same for all public schools, district and charter.

Only a few schools are truly innovative

Mr. Toch states that "a few schools in both states (Michican and Arizona) are truly innovative." Between these two states there are more than 350 charter schools and Mr. Toch visited less than three dozen schools. After visiting less than 10 percent of these states' charter schools, he feels qualified to conclude that only a "few" are truly innovative. I would encourage Mr. Toch to talk with parents and educators from the other 300 schools to determine how many are truly innovative. I am confident these parents and educators will deem nearly every charter school innovative.

"Scores of Arizona's charter schools curriculum and teaching are weak, buildings are substandard and financial abuses are surprisingly prevalent."

Mr. Toch also generalizes his limited experience in Arizona's charter schools when he says that in "scores of Arizona's charter schools curriculum and teaching are weak, buildings are substandard and financial abuses are surprisingly prevalent." In the three years of charter school operation in Arizona, only six charter school operations have shut down. Of these, zero were closed because of "weak curriculum." Arizona's charter school facilities are subject to local, county and state building codes and charter school operators must obtain requisite permits prior to occupying buildings. These facilities may not be opulent, but they are certainly not "substandard." To ascertain the financial health of charter schools, an annual external audit must be conducted on each charter school (both program and financial areas included), charter schools publicly adopt annual budgets, and they submit an annual financial report to the Superintendent of Public Instruction.

Charter high schools short-changing students

Mr. Toch criticizes several secondary charter school operators who teach at-risk students and utilize computerized instruction. He fails to mention that 12 percent of these students were previously not attending school. Attending four hours per day and receiving computerized curriculum that is aligned with our state academic standards is a phenomenal accomplishment for these students.

Teacher incentives and salaries

Mr. Toch mentions charter schools that award bonuses to teachers based on increased student achievement and the fact that charter school teachers are typically underpaid. In the first case, HOORAY! How wonderful that charter schools are creating salary incentives that relate to student achievement rather than to years in the classroom. And in the second case, he is mistaken. In a recent survey of 66 Arizona charter schools, we found that charter school teachers are paid slightly above the state average for district school teachers. (The survey included more charter schools than Mr. Toch visited in both Arizona and Michigan.)

Education Week, June 10, 1998

Charter Schools Struggle With Accountability

By Lynn Schnaiberg

Pauline McBeth says she has no problem being held accountable for how well her students perform.

It's just part of the deal: Charter schools receive flexibility and freedom from cumbersome regulations in exchange for accepting greater responsibility for student results. But for Ms. McBeth, the coordinator of the 4-year-old Community Involved Charter School in Lakewood, Colo., figuring out just how that formula works is proving far from easy.

An Occasional Series

The 260-student school is decidedly unconventional. Children learn in multiage classrooms. They do not receive letter grades or credits. Portfolios chart student learning.

In Colorado and many other states with charter laws, such innovations and individualized curricula—which some see as the very essence of the charter movement—are having to contend with accountability systems based on standards and performance goals set at the state or district level.

"More accountability in exchange for flexibility: It's a nice cliché, but people have to prove it," said Peter Huidekoper, a former educator who led an outside team that evaluated charter schools in Jefferson County, Colo., including Ms. McBeth's. Many schools and their sponsors, he said, need help striking that balance.

The reality, he added, is that in their first years of existence, many charter schools are hard-pressed to focus on accountability when they face more immediate concerns, such as how to pay the electric bill.

The intersection of the charter school movement with the push for accountability has raised a host of difficult questions:

- How good is good enough? How many of the goals set in its charter must a school meet? Or how close to those goals must it come?
- Should a charter school be judged on its own merits or in comparison with other public schools?
- If charter schools exist in part to be innovative and free from traditional approaches, should they be held to traditional ways of measuring achievement?
- How much should "market" accountability, as gauged by parent satisfaction, count in the equation?

'Hard To Measure'

At Ms. McBeth's suburban Denver school, the issue of how well the students stack up became an issue last year when the charter came up for renewal before the Jefferson County school board. Board members had a hard time interpreting the student portfolios used to measure progress toward the school's sometimes fuzzy goals.

And students did not perform well on the standardized test that all the other schools in the district use. While Ms. McBeth and her colleagues did not put much faith in the test, the district did. Citing a number of concerns, the board wound up renewing the school for just one year.

"It was tough," said Ms. McBeth, who spent 25 years as a teacher, counselor, and administrator in the Denver public schools before joining the K-12 school. "We tried to take the ambiguity out, but our school is hard to measure."

This year, with a freshly articulated plan, the school won a vote of confidence with a more standard five-year contract.

In charter schools, accountability means different things, especially given the wide disparities in the states with charter laws.

Charter schools are accountable to the sponsors that grant them charters—such as districts, state education agencies, or universities. They are accountable both for student achievement and for their finances and operation.

And they must also answer to their "customers." Students and parents can express their dissatisfaction by sending their children elsewhere. Many advocates consider charter schools the ultimate in accountability: Those that fail to meet their goals will go out of business.

Yet, with nearly 800 charter public schools up and running in 23 states and the District of Columbia, the way accountability plays out varies from place to place.

Some states, such as Arizona, have taken a more hands-off approach toward their charter schools, counting on market forces to reinforce the good and weed out the bad. Critics there have raised concerns that there is too little oversight, and that the quality of education in some of the state's 241 charter schools is spotty.

Other states, such as Massachusetts, have in place strict oversight provisions—seen by many as important safeguards, though some charter supporters warn that too much regulation can stifle innovation.

Stages of Accountability

Accountability efforts can intersect with charter schools at several stages of their development: in proposals for new charters, while the schools are up and running, and when their charters are renewed.

A recent report by the University of Minnesota's Center for School Change highlights the need for sponsors and charter operators to agree—before a charter is granted—on several critical issues: What are the school's measurable goals? What assessments will be used? What will be acceptable levels of student performance?

The degree to which that articulation is happening nationally is mixed, said Joe Nathan, one of the report's authors and a nationally known charter school proponent.

By and large, charter schools are required to meet the same academic standards and use the same tests as other public schools in their states, according to Jeanne Allen, the president of the Center for Education Reform, a Washington research group that supports school choice.

In California and other states where districts are the main chartering agencies, many of the details around standards and testing are negotiated on a school-by-school basis.

"Charter schools are right to question whether they should be viewed in the same light as other schools," Ms. Allen said. "Using a failed accountability system to measure progress in charter schools is not right. And that's what's happening to a certain extent."

To Jim Norris, charter schools are clearly a different animal from regular public schools like the ones he taught in before joining Constellation Community Charter Middle School in Long Beach, Calif. In his eyes, they are also more accountable.

"People in public education are demanding of us the real accountability, compared to what they have on paper in those three-ring binders on the shelf," he said.

Going Out of Business

National experts estimate that since the charter movement picked up steam a few years ago, roughly two dozen charter schools have gone out of business. Many fizzled from financial or management troubles, not academic shortcomings, Ms. Allen said.

The Dakota Open Charter School in Morton, Minn., was an exception. State school board members eventually stripped the charter of the K-12 school on the Lower Sioux reservation, closing the high school in 1997 and the lower grades earlier this year.

"There was clearly not much of any kind of education program going on at the school," Marsha R. Gronseth, the state board's executive director, said. But the revocation came only after exhaustive audits, site visits, and technical help from the state.

She added: "There's always the struggle of how quickly do you act and how much benefit of the doubt do you give in working these problems out. You don't want to bring the hammer down too quickly."

Controlling Quality

Some sponsors also face political pressures, either to clamp down on charter schools or give them more breathing room.

Add in the fact that closing a school can leave families in a lurch, and it quickly becomes clear that shutting down a charter school is no small matter, said James Goenner, who oversees charter schools for Central Michigan University. The university has sponsored 46 of Michigan's 108 charters.

"There's the standards debate about accountability, but there are a lot of legal and technical realities that go beyond the philosophy," Mr. Goenner added.

While many sponsors require schools to file yearly progress reports, charter renewal is the formal juncture when sponsors take stock of whether schools are living up to their promises.

With a few exceptions, most state charter laws do not give much guidance on renewal. Most charters are granted for five-year terms. But Arizona and the District of Columbia offer 15-year charters, which some observers say could allow poor-performing schools to slide by for years.

Many experts point to Massachusetts as a national model in articulating how to hold charter schools accountable. The task is somewhat easier there, they note, because the state is the primary sponsor of charter schools. The reverse is true in places like California and Colorado.

In the latter states, charter school operators are crafting accountability and renewal guidelines with a dual purpose: as protection from potentially arbitrary decisions by a less-than-friendly sponsor; and as a self-regulating quality-control effort.

"We want to avoid the renewal process becoming a rubber stamp, as I would suggest it already has become in some places in Colorado," said James Griffin, who runs the Colorado League of Charter Schools.

"It defeats our whole purpose," he added. "We have a huge stake in quality control."

In California, many in the charter school movement say the renewal process often focuses on everything but student results. Mr. Norris, the head of the Constellation school in Long Beach, recently led a panel on charter renewal at a statewide charter school meeting.

"The issues seemed to boil down to the question of 'Who's in charge here?' " he said. "Charters are looking to get more control. And districts and unions want to take back some of that power."

'No Magic Target'

At a recent daylong meeting of educators from Chicago's six operating and eight newly approved charter schools, school and district officials spent much of the morning hashing out accountability issues.

But the remainder of the day, geared toward the newer schools, was dedicated to somewhat more mundane issues, such as food service, pension funds, and immunization of students.

The reality, said Greg A. Richmond, the charter school director for the Chicago public schools, is that most charters are so busy with day-to-day operations that they have little time to ponder how they will demonstrate success before the school board.

The district has sought philanthropic support to help the charter schools devise ways of assessing hard-to-measure goals, such as good citizenship or parent involvement. And the district is drafting a yearly accountability plan that each charter school will file as a means of tracking progress.

Throughout the meeting, the tensions over accountability were clear. Some educators said they believe standardized test scores are meaningless; others want them as their primary measure of success. Some welcome the district's guidance, while others see it as an intrusion.

"Some schools have asked, 'What's the magic target?' 'What do we have to achieve?' " Mr. Richmond said. "We don't know. There's no one thing."

***Boston Globe*, June 19, 1998**

Final is trial for charter pupils

by Lolly Bowean

It was her final exam and sophomore Tasheena M. Jones took it standing up, calculating math problems and explaining the to a panel of "jurors' who would decide if she had mastered her subject. Jones, 15, was one of about 140 students who took the innovative oral final exams this week at City on a Hill Charter School. Students must make half-hour presentations to community volunteers who critique their work based not just on their answers, but on their reasoning.

"It's good to do because usually you're like, 'it's the end of the year, I'm done, I don't have to know this stuff anymore," said Jones. "But with the jury, you have to know it because they will ask you questions. You have to have it down all the way through and remember stuff from last year, last month, last week. It's not about fright, it's about learning."

Sarah Kass, the principal and founder of the three-year-old school, said the program also allows the public to hold the school accountable for how well it is teaching.

"We want people outside in the community to come in and see what these kids are learning," Kass said. "It's one thing to stand in front of the class and do it, but to defend your work in front of people who don't know you, who want to see how much you know - that's a challenge."

City on a Hill is one of five charter schools in Boston. The schools get public funding, but are run independently of school boards and teachers unions. Students yesterday were examined in math, speech, history, and reading. They could be found reciting George Washington's farewell address in a history presentation, interpreting Shakespeare's comedy "The Tempest," and giving speeches on citizenship.
One student who failed her history exam said later she agreed she had not given a clear enough presentation - and is determined to do so when she retakes the exam in the fall.

Jurors are given packages of material summarizing the work students will present, and from those packages, prepare their questions in advance.

"When I first came here I was scared to talk in class," said sophomore Josephina R. Pires. "Everybody was scared. But that was when I was a freshman. But during the year you're always asked to stand, talk, explain this to the class. You're ready when you go to the jury."

I like the idea of a school being accountable to the public," said Martha L. Minow, a volunteer juror and professor at Harvard Law School. Minow served as a juror for the history students, and after hearing an impressive recitation and explanation from sophomore Christopher Ray of the 1803 Supreme Court case Marbury vs. Madison, she encouraged him to consider law school. The program introduces students to community leaders and possible mentors.

"They get to hear feedback and learn how to improve their work. I get inspired by them," Minow said. "I get a sense of their range of talent and how much of their presentation is hard work. To get a good score, most of it has to be hard work.

I have my eye on at least one of them right now," Minow said, referring to Ray. "When students work this hard they deserve our support. They are impressive."

The New Republic, **June 15, 1998**

PEOPLE'S PREP

By Mark Francis Cohen

Inside the make-do dining hall, at the northern end of the clock tower building, the students are microwaving breakfast. The room's acoustics amplify the din, as more seventh- and eighth-graders storm in for bacon strips, cereal from plastic containers, and bottled water. At one table, Slimer (pronounced Se-lema) Jackson, a 14-year-old in curlicue earrings, is finishing a bagel—and avoiding eye contact. "I know I go to school here and I sleep here," she huffs, "but *this* is not my home." Her roommate and dining partner, Tanesha Boyd, couldn't agree more. "It's just a place where you lay your head at night."

Go to any prestigious boarding school in the country, and you'll find privileged, overindulged children who think the exact same way. But Jackson and Boyd aren't children of privilege, and they're not getting indulged—at least not in the traditional sense. Rather, Jackson and Boyd are among 48 children who attend New Jersey's Samuel DeWitt Proctor Academy Charter School, a cross between an academic boot camp and an elite prep school that has been billed as the nation's first public boarding academy.

Proctor's mission is to remove disadvantaged children from their disadvantaged backgrounds, place them in a secluded boarding school environment, and prepare them for college. Although the idea of a public boarding school may strike many Americans as odd—remember the ridicule of Newt Gingrich's proposal for more orphanages four years ago—Proctor may well represent the beginning of a new trend in American education. Residential schools focused on needy children are set to open in Washington, D.C., and throughout Minnesota. One opened late last year in Boston.

And that might just be a good thing. When I ask Jackson and Boyd whether they are glad to be here, complaints and all, they quickly say "yes." Although reluctant to give up some of the rites of childhood, they are eager for a chance to get a leg up on college—and beyond. "You can't do nothing without money," says Slimer, whose average-sized dorm room is plastered with dozens of pictures of rapper Sean "Puffy" Combs. "This education will take me farther. Here I'll be able to get a scholarship. I can't afford to pay college tuition." I hear the same sentiments from other students: "Here they push us," says another breakfast companion, seventh-grader Amaris Horton. "They know we can do better."

It's not hard to understand why these kids would appreciate such encouragement, even at such a relatively young age. Proctor draws its student body from nearby Trenton, where the unemployment rate is 9.7 percent. Sixty percent of Proctor students qualify for the federal student lunch program; at the outset of the year, the school decided to test the children's eyesight and found that a quarter of them needed glasses.

Back home, most children choose playing around instead of studying, and they shun those who do otherwise. Of the more than 2,600 children who attend Trenton Central High, generally only one-third of them graduate within four years. Last year alone, almost a quarter of the students dropped out. As for the children who stuck with school and were presumably excelling, the statistical portrait is equally withering—a function, in part, of all the problems that so famously plague public schools. Ten of the twelve students who were confident enough to take the Advanced Placement test in United States history scored the lowest possible score: one on a five-point scale. The others earned twos. Only 146 students took the Scholastic Assessment Test, and their average combined math and verbal score was 799. The state average was 1,006.

The scores from Proctor won't be in for some time—it's still in its first year—but they'll likely look a lot different. Proctor is located on a sprawling, golf-course-green campus with tree-shaded drives and red-brick, colonial-style buildings—a setting that creates a quiet, serious environment for learning. Students live by a strict regimen that firms up their behavior and taps the mind: five class periods, morning and afternoon advisory sessions, two hours of study after class, virtually no television, homework check-ins with residential advisers, laundry chores, and uniforms. Generally, the only time they leave the campus unmonitored is during the summer and on weekends, when they can go home. If a student skips a homework assignment or makes an unsatisfactory grade, the consequences may be an early bedtime, missing out on a field trip, or remaining at school for the weekend.

A key element of Proctor's education is small class size—just twelve students to a class. "It's better academically," says Fiona Simpson, an eighth-grader. "Teachers pay more attention to you." Teachers appreciate this, too, just as they appreciate the freshly painted rooms and ample supply of materials lacking in other public schools. Over the year, they have gotten to know their pupils well and to like them. In fact, many of the teachers stick around after school for study hall; some even bring students into their homes to meet the spouse. In group advisories, they encourage the children to read interesting magazine articles, seek promising summer jobs, and take music lessons. "Because the classes are so small, I can touch all the kids," says Jennifer Geoghan, the school's upbeat English teacher. "Sometimes I take it for granted, but then I remember how lucky I am. And I am lucky to have so few students." The school's director, Gary T. Reece, puts in long hours (he frequently stays at work past nine o'clock in the evening) and spends a lot of time thinking about innovation. His latest idea is a fully integrated curriculum, in which students would learn science at the same time they were learning, say, Spanish and math.

Of course, while it's pretty clear Proctor has been good for the students lucky enough to attend, it's not so obvious that Proctor is good for public education generally. Schooling at Proctor is enormously expensive—about $17,000 per student, including room and board—and only $7,911 of that comes from the school district. This is a state requirement; private donations make up the difference. Proctor's administrators—who say they're struggling to stretch their budget already—would prefer the district send more money their way. But Trenton officials complain, understandably, that Proctor is already siphoning off money, and some of the best students, from the district's other schools.

Educators elsewhere looking to replicate Proctor's success should also realize that a key factor in the school's success is the strength of the student body. The same legislation that made Proctor possible, a 1996 state charter law, forbade discrimination of any type. Although the original idea of Proctor was to target at-risk kids who had already displayed emotional and educational problems, enrollment came down to a lottery. Of the parents who entered their children, most were already involved in their kids' education; as a result, the applicant pool represented an unusually well-motivated (and often high-achieving) bunch. "I wanted to get him out of the environment he was in, but I couldn't afford private school," says Vernell Shabazz, whose 13-year-old attends the school.

But these are caveats, not rejoinders. Too high a concentration of problem children could bring down a school anyway; mixing the achievers and underachievers might just be the formula for success. And wealthy families send high-achieving children to special schools. Why shouldn't less wealthy families have the same opportunity? Finally, while the high expense may preclude replication of Proctor on a grand scale, there's no reason that *some* districts—particularly those in areas where sources of private money may indeed be relatively accessible—can't use public boarding schools to help *some* kids.

At the very least, it will be interesting to watch Proctor's progress over the next few years. Says Reece, Proctor's director, "We've created a safe haven here where kids can risk caring about school without suffering for it." By all appearances he's right. And, given all the well-chronicled problems with public education these days, that's no small achievement.

MARK FRANCIS COHEN is a New York-based freelance journalist who formerly covered Brooklyn for *The New York Times*.

Detroit News, May 20, 1998

Detroit charter schools unique

Experts praise move usually opposed by public school systems

by Charles Hurt

DETROIT -- Longtime champion of public education, Deputy Supt. Arthur Carter, may surprise some in his role as architect of seven new charter schools.

The Detroit Board of Education also has jumped into the school chartering business with Carter.

"We're the first to admit that we may not be the best alternative for every student," Carter explained. "We want to build a commonwealth of schools and create an atmosphere of choice for parents."

But the school board's vote last week to charter seven new schools is highly unusual for a public school system. Carter said by next fall, Detroit students will have the widest selection of city-sponsored charter schools in the country.

"That's unique," said Charles Chieppo, of the Charter School Resource Center in Boston. "One of the main enemies of charter schools has always been the traditional public schools."

While cities like Boston have city-sponsored charter schools, he said, those charters heavily restrict the competition between the traditional and charter school.

"You've got to give (Detroit school board members) credit," Chieppo said. "I've never heard of that happening anywhere else."

The new Detroit charter schools -- alternatives to traditional public education -- are funded publicly and operate independently of the city school board and administration.

While distantly monitored by the chartering entity, the individual schools write their own curriculum and budget. Public school systems have opposed charter schools because they compete for the same students and the more than $6,000 in state money that comes with each pupil in Detroit.

"Why is Detroit chartering their own competition?" asks James Goenner, director of charter schools for Central Michigan University, which sponsors 46 charter schools throughout the state. "They're getting more involved. It's kind of exciting."

The addition of the seven charter schools by the Detroit school board will bring the total to 10 this fall. About seven additional charter schools are under consideration, Carter said.

But not all Detroit educators support charter schools. "It's a way of going after public education," said board member Alonzo Bates, one of four board members to vote against the charter schools. "And it's a way to open the door to vouchers. I'm totally opposed to it."

In this election year, board members scrambled behind the scenes to avoid having to vote on the charter issue, Bates said.

Those up for re-election didn't want to offend the unions -- which oppose charter schools -- or city preachers, who support charter schools.

It's of little consolation to him that the city school system will monitor the new schools.

"We can't keep track of what we're doing in all our schools," Bates said. "How can we watch these other schools, too?"

Others are less skeptical. Former Michigan Bell executive Charlie Boyce graduated from Detroit Public Schools and married a city school's principal, but he's quick to point out that the city needs alternatives to the existing public schools. He says without innovation, employers will have to go elsewhere to find qualified workers.

"As vice-president of urban affairs, I worked hard to bring Detroit graduates into the company," he said Monday. "But no matter how hard I tried, it was nearly impossible."

So, he has helped develop plans to open a high school -- chartered by the district -- that will teach students technical construction trades.

"I want to give students -- especially those who don't have the educational prowess to go to college -- an opportunity to make a good living in the construction business," said Boyce.

Boyce teamed up with preacher and construction company owner Michael Wimberley to open Michigan Institute for Construction Trades to 250 students in the fall.

"There is such a backlog for workers," Wimberley said. "At the same time you have this incredible number of people who are virtually idle. I thought it would be a good marriage."

In a blighted neighborhood on Detroit's east side, a preacher and some residents from the community bought a deserted Catholic school and opened Colin Powell Academy, chartered by Central Michigan.

"In the midst of the broken glass and drug paraphernalia, we started a school," said Director Donna James. "This is one of those vacant buildings children had to walk past on the way to school."

The school, which requires uniforms and a strict code of conduct, is tailored specifically to the problems in its neighborhood.

"I love it here. It's the best thing that happened to my children," said Tamarra Hughes, whose two children attend the school.

Her 12-year-old son enrolled last fall, does his homework and looks forward to school. He recently won first place for a speech he gave.

The close attention and tailored curriculum at Colin Powell Academy is exactly what charter schools can do that sprawling 180,000-student systems can't, Carter said.

"This is the history of American education," he said. "In the beginning, public schools were one-room school houses with lay boards." Carter sees Detroit's new charter schools as a return to those basics.

Washington Post, May 4, 1998

Charter Schools Face Tests in Rush to Get Ready

By Valerie Strauss
Washington Post Staff Writer

More than a dozen new public charter schools in the District are expected to open their doors next fall, offering new educational opportunities to several thousand schoolchildren and leading the Washington area in a nationwide movement that supporters say can reform public education.

With four months left before the new school year begins, educators and community activists are racing to find buildings, hire teachers, buy supplies and set up governing boards and curriculum—melding traditional elements of education with untraditional approaches to learning.

"I am on a mission," said L. Lawrence Riccio, a Trinity College professor who is opening the Public Charter School for Arts in Learning for special education students. "The bottom line is that there needs to be nontraditional ways of teaching kids. Look around you. There are so many kids failing and falling through the cracks. There has to be other ways to do this."

The range of these charter schools, which are publicly funded but function outside a public school system's bureaucracy, is wide. Daanen Strachan, Howard University's associate director for student activities, is launching a technology-focused college preparatory high school. Educator Sonia Gutierrez is opening an adult education center. Educator Linda R. Moore is starting an elementary school with a core liberal arts and science curriculum. Many of the schools are accepting applications and will hold a lottery if demand is too great.

But as the charter founders work—often before and after regular full-time jobs—they are confronting serious concerns about how they will operate their schools, which are tuition-free and permitted to set their hours and curriculum as long as they meet certain performance standards.

Many of those educators have never run schools, and questions are being raised—by critics and supporters—about whether they will have sufficient supervision. Indeed, one of the two agencies that will monitor charters, the D.C. Board of Education, concedes it does not have the resources to do an adequate job.

"We're going to need to increase our capacity," said board member Tonya Vidal Kinlow (At Large), who heads the charter school committee. "We don't have the funds yet, but we're going to ask for it."

Maryland and Virginia have no laws allowing charter schools. But the subject looms large in the District—where there already are three such schools—because the potential for their proliferation is significant.

The D.C. charter law, one of the broadest in the country, allows 20 new charter schools each year. In a city with 146 traditional public schools, many of which are seen as failing, both critics and supporters say it may not take long before charter schools are a major part of the educational landscape.

The most exposure D.C. residents have had to charter schools has been the controversy surrounding the Marcus Garvey Public Charter School, whose principal at the time, Mary A.T. Anigbo, was convicted of assaulting a reporter last year. She later was fired in a messy dispute with Garvey's board of trustees, and the school board is considering revoking Garvey's charter.

"I hate to say it, but the whole specter of Marcus Garvey hangs over every charter school in the District," said Jim Ford, who works for Boston-based Advantage Schools, which is helping to open charter schools in the city. "Having that as literally the first public exposure of a charter school in the District was unfortunate. . . . We are taking internal steps to avoid having that happen again."

Garvey won its charter in 1996 with little discussion by the school board, which is one reason authorities have tightened chartering procedures. Under the D.C. charter law passed by Congress, the school board and the congressionally mandated D.C. Public Charter School Board, each with its own procedures, are allowed to grant charters to local organizations. Each already has chartered its maximum of 10 schools a year and is beginning to take proposals for the 1999-2000 academic year.

Because this is the city's first full-blown chartering effort, the boards and applicants learned on the job, discovering unanticipated problems, especially the acquisition of buildings. As a result, not all of the 20 chartered schools will be ready to open in September—although a pro-charter group called Friends of Choice in Urban Schools, or FOCUS, expects that at least a dozen will be launched, serving some 3,000 children.

The uncertainty over which schools will open underscores the experimental nature of the charter movement, first pioneered in Minnesota in 1991. There are now nearly 800 charter schools nationwide, more than 500 of which have opened in the last two years. Some have been resounding successes; others quickly collapsed.

"People shouldn't be shocked if some [D.C.] public charters don't open on time or if some close in a year or two or three," said Lex Towle, of Appletree Institute, a nonprofit group that assists charter schools. "This is a new industry, and each school has to be thought of as a separate ongoing business. . . . When you get a critical mass of good independent public schools, particularly in the inner city where they are most important, that will help create the competition that will raise the level of other public schools."

Many D.C. parents are equally excited about that prospect, in part because they say charter schools offer greater opportunity for real involvement in their children's education.

Ramon Thompson's 5-year-old daughter attends kindergarten at Adams Elementary School in Northwest Washington, and he wants an alternative.

"She doesn't get homework, and I have to go out and buy my own workbooks and work with her in the evening," said Thompson, who wants to enroll his child in a charter school next fall. "I went to a meeting . . . and got very excited when they talked about the programs, the longer school day, the longer after-school care."

Daanen Strachan, 31, is the youngest charter school founder in the District. After running unsuccessfully for the D.C. school board in 1994, he began looking for ways to help schoolchildren. "I was just sitting and reading my newspaper about a year ago and suddenly thought, 'Wouldn't [a charter school] be a good way to bring technology to students of the District?' "

Not everybody shares Strachan's enthusiasm for charter schools—or agrees with Towle's assessment of how they will force traditional schools to improve. Harvard University educator Gary Orfield and others argue that although charter schools may inspire some competition, they will not result in the improvement of troubled schools.

"What is wrong with inner city schools is not lack of competition," Orfield said. "It is that they are completely overwhelmed with incredible problems. The net effect of having a series of charter schools might very well be to intensify those problems because the kids likely to get in are the ones who have the most organized families and the best chance anyway. It ... leaves the already overwhelmed school with even more difficult circumstances."

Critics also say that reforming the system is better from within.

"Schools that work best are those that operate pretty much in an independent fashion as possible, public or private," said Jay Silberman, an at-large school board member. "Schools can be functionally independent within a school system if you have a decentralized system that doesn't have a top-down bureaucracy but has a system of support services [for] local schools. That's what we should be building. To my way of thinking, everything else is a distraction."

Distraction or not, a portion of the D.C. school budget will be given to each charter, an amount to be calculated on a per-pupil cost basis. But without knowing how many students the charter schools will serve, that figure has not yet been determined.

Charter founders say they are concerned that the amount does not include funds for facilities, and that they may wind up being shortchanged. The D.C. Council is set to vote on the cost issue tomorrow.

Finding space has turned out to be perhaps the biggest problem for charter founders everywhere, according to charter experts. Many D.C. charter founders had hoped to lease—at low rates—empty school buildings. The charter law says charter schools should get preference, but charter founders say the school system set the prices too high—or made the process too cumbersome. Some secured school properties, but others found space elsewhere, such as in empty office space at Waterside Mall in Southwest Washington, where three schools are expected to open in a "charter hub." A few schools still do not have leases, and many are renting temporary space for a few years.

Financing has been another problem. Although the federal government so far has provided nearly $90,000 for each approved D.C. charter applicant to help with start-up efforts, far more is needed for facilities. Since many banks refused to give loans with no collateral, some schools have sought revenue from private foundations and other government agencies, winning hundreds of thousands of dollars.

Charter founders have formed a coalition and regularly meet to thrash out common problems. They keep coming back to one issue. "We're all in it for accountability," said Malcolm Peabody, co-president of FOCUS. "If [Marcus] Garvey gets closed, that is good news. Schools that don't do it right ought to close."

Wall Street Journal, April 13, 1998

Asides

Student Guarantee

A Boston charter school has announced it will offer the first "learning guarantee" in the nation by a public school. If students at the Academy of the Pacific Rim don't pass their 10th-grade state assessment test the school will allow the parents to pick another school they trust and transfer to it the $7,400 in annual state funding that goes to each pupil. The guarantee applies only to those students who agree to work with tutors if the school feels they're falling behind and if parents sign and return weekly progress reports on their children. "Guarantees exist for mufflers, airline service and dozens of services in America," says Stacey Boyd, the founding director of Pacific Rim. "Yet no service, save perhaps health care, matters as much to a person's livelihood than education." Other schools would do well to examine this approach. Schools will only earn the autonomy they desire if they prove they can deliver the accountability parents demand.

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Selected Readings on School Reform

School Choice—And Choices

Independence Day came early this year for school choice advocates and children stuck in crummy schools. On April 22 a group of Texas tycoons pledged $50 million to supply every single low-income child in the Edgewood School District (an impoverished slice of the San Antonio metropolitan area) with a voucher redeemable at any public or private school. Then, on June 9, philanthropists John Walton and Ted Forstmann unveiled a giant matching-grant program for private scholarships around the country, intended to total at least $200 million over four years and to assist tens of thousands of children to switch schools (without a nickel of public funding). The following day brought the Wisconsin Supreme Court's much-anticipated school choice verdict, and choice advocates were given one more reason to celebrate. In the words of *Wall Street Journal* columnist Paul Gigot, the events had "the feel of a dam breaking."

We begin, fittingly, with Gigot's June 12 column. Then to *New York Times* accounts of the San Antonio voucher program, Forstmann and Walton's Children's Scholarship Fund, and the dramatic Wisconsin verdict. We also thought you would like to see some key bits of the Court's opinion, which we have included for your perusal.

Next up is a short but monumental op-ed from *The Wall Street Journal* entitled "Why I'm Reluctantly Backing Vouchers" by Arthur Levine, President of Teachers College, Columbia University. (If he keeps taking stances like these, he might not be President for long!)

Some libertarians fret that publicly-funded vouchers will lead to government control of private schools. In his *Policy Review* article, "Blocking the Exits," Clint Bolick of the Institute for Justice urges his fellow conservatives to cast aside theoretical concerns and "come over to the freedom side."

Choice has reached pre-school, too. With "Voucher Plans Surface in Hearing on Head Start Reauthorization" (*Education Week*) and "New York City Is to Use Public Funds for Private Pre-Kindergarten Classes" (*The New York Times*) we learn about two interesting moves in this direction.

Finally, Richard Whitmire argues in *The Washington Monthly* that it's time to make "A Vital Compromise" and try vouchers in our worst public schools. We couldn't agree more.

BRW

***Wall Street Journal*, June 12, 1998**

School Choice: Once Fantasy, Now Reality

The great conservative temptation is pessimism: We tend to think the world is always going to hell. Which is all the more reason to cheer that the once-impossible crusade for education choice is becoming inevitable.

Some of us can remember when "vouchers" were little more than one of Milton Friedman's libertarian dreams. They were about as politically achievable as, well, breaking up the Soviet Union. But some miracles you live long enough to see, and what has become the education-choice movement is now slowly busting apart the public-school bureaucracy's stranglehold on poor kids.

Recent events have the feel of a dam breaking:

- The Wisconsin Supreme Court voted 4-2 Wednesday in favor of that state's voucher plan for 15,000 Milwaukee students. The big news here is that the court blew away what has been the status quo's Jericho Wall—the argument that vouchers redeemed at religious schools violate the separation of church and state.

- As long as the money passes through parents, the judges said, the Milwaukee plan passes constitutional muster. Just as Pell grants can flow through college-age students to Notre Dame or Yeshiva, state money can also follow kids to private elementary schools.

Let us hope opponents of the ruling are foolish enough to appeal to the current U.S. Supreme Court. The result could be the best decision for minority education since *Brown v. Board of Education*.

- Financier Ted Forstmann and his friends are donating $200 million for K-12 private-school scholarships nationwide. This is the best kind of philanthropy: Putting cash directly in the hands of people so they can help themselves. It ought to shame the Ford and Rockefeller Foundations that squander their money on the schemes of social workers.

Nina Shokraii of the Heritage Foundation estimates there are now at least 56 of these private scholarship programs around the country. In Washington, D.C., more than 7,500 poor children applied for 1,000 scholarships. Thus have the donors exposed how deeply unpopular urban public schools are among the very people they claim to serve.

- The political debate is turning, even among liberals. The initial defections on the left came from local politicians who saw the tragedy of urban schools up close: Polly Williams in Milwaukee was first and bravest.

Next came a few national black politicians with their ears to the ground: Former Democratic congressman, Rev. Floyd Flake of Queens, has been eloquent. As spokesmen for choice, they provide credibility that libertarian academics never could.

But now the choice heresy is spreading even to mainstream Democrats. Bob Byrd, the West Virginia monument, told the Senate recently he was voting for Sen. Paul Coverdell's (R., Ga.) education-savings accounts because it was time to try something new. He's voted more money for schools every year, he said, but they never get any better.

Even more startling, Sen. John Kerry, from the Kennedy Commonwealth of Massachusetts, says he may endorse choice if conservatives agree to spend more on schools. Mr. Kerry may figure this will soften his image as a reflexive liberal for a presidential run, but the teachers unions will paint a bull's-eye on his back.

It's naive to think victory is at hand, of course. The status-quo forces still have money (via union dues) and clout, especially with President Clinton on their side—the same president who praised Polly Williams when he was trying to sound like a New Democrat in 1990. Looking ahead, Vice President Al Gore acts like a wholly-owned subsidiary of the National Education Association.

But the Kremlin never expected to be overrun either. The choice movement's growth is being fueled by evidence and moral argument. The evidence is the manifest failure of urban public schools.

Only 15% of Washington, D.C., children read "below basic" on the Stanford 9 test in first grade. By 10th grade, 53% test below basic. In 10th-grade math, an incredible 89% score below basic. In other words, kids do worse the longer they're in schools that spend more than $9,000 a year per student.

These results are morally unacceptable. They are the worst scandal in American public life. Today it is the left that is standing in the schoolhouse door, telling parents their children must live with broken windows, metal detectors and dropout rates of 50%.

Liberals are the ones defending the status quo because of an ideological fetish—a belief in a wall of church-state "separation" that is higher than America's founders ever intended. In politics, moral arguments trump such abstractions every time.

Conservatives are understandably skeptical of the idea of "progress," especially in politics. They assume everything is getting worse, and usually they're right. They're certainly right that the GOP Congress is disappointing.

But once in a while a Berlin Wall does fall. Once in a while Social Security can be reformed with private retirement accounts. And as we are now learning, even the public-school monopoly can be beaten.

New York Times, April 23, 1998

Texas Business Foundation To Pay for School Vouchers

San Antonio District Is Offered $50 Million

By CAROL MARIE CROPPER

DALLAS, April 22 — A foundation started by business leaders in San Antonio announced today that it would provide $50 million for a voucher program to allow poor students in one city district to attend private or parochial schools over the next 10 years.

Under the program, any student who qualifies for the Federal lunch program — 93 percent in the district do — will be eligible for up to $3,600 a year through eighth grade and up to $4,000 a year in high school to attend a private school within the Edgewood Independent School District, which has 14,000 students.

If they choose to attend private school outside the district, beginning in the 1998-1999 school year, the students would receive slightly less money in what would become the nation's largest privately financed school voucher program.

The district, with a largely Hispanic population of about 40,000, includes at least four private schools whose tuition ranges from about $1,000 to $3,000. Although other business leaders around the country have provided the families of poor children with the money to attend private school, the San Antonio effort is the first to provide tuition for an entire district.

The scholarships will "raise the bar for everyone" and, the business leaders hope, will promote economic development in the district, said Robert Aguirre, the managing director of the Children's Educational Opportunity Foundation, which is providing the $50 million and which has been financing some district students since it was founded in 1992 by business leaders who support vouchers as a way to force public schools to improve.

The money is being provided by one of the organization's founders, James Leininger, a doctor who started Kenetic Concepts, a company that makes hospital beds, and by the C.E.O America Foundation, a national umbrella group for local voucher programs.

Fritz Steiger, president of C.E.O. America, which says it has more than 500 corporate and individual contributors across the country, said he expected educational researchers to focus on Edgewood to see the effects of a voucher program.

But opponents like the Texas Federation of Teachers, the teachers' union, said it believed that the vouchers would allow private schools to select the best students.

"It shortens the honor roll," John O'Sullivan, secretary-treasurer of the union told The Associated Press. "One of the strengths of the public school system is is puts everyone together."

Others say the vouchers would drain money from public schools.

"I'm very concerned because it will have a major impact on the district's providing a good education for the entire population that we still have," said Dolores Munoz, superintendent of the Edgewood district.

The district's schools have been improving with changes made in the last five or six years, Dr. Munoz said, adding, "We don't have any low-performing schools."

Last year, of the district's 27 schools, 6 won the Texas Successful Schools award for academic improvement and 2 were recognized for high test scores, said Edna Prez-Vega, a district spokeswoman.

Because of the improvements and parental support, Dr. Munoz predicted that fewer than 500 students would take the scholarships — a number that she said the system could adjust to. If the departures grow closer to 1,000, she said, it could lead to teacher layoffs and school closings.

Edgewood was not chosen because it was the city's worst school district, Mr. Aguirre said, but because it was small enough to make a concentrated effort where results could be measured but large enough to make a difference.

Clint Bolick, litigation director for the Institute for Justice, a nonprofit organization based in Washington that provides legal assistance to advocates of school vouchers, said opponents would have a tough time challenging the legality of the Edgewood experiment because it is financed with private money.

"Edgewood," Mr. Bolick said, "could be as important for the school choice movement as Little Rock was for the school desegregation movement."

New York Times, June 10, 1998

Voucher Program for Inner-City Children

Businessmen Plan to Raise $200 Million to Pay for Private Tuition

By JACQUES STEINBERG

A group of business leaders pledged yesterday to raise $200 million for a national voucher program that would permit at least 50,000 inner-city public-school children to attend parochial and other private schools over the next four years. The businessmen said they were trying to prod failing public schools into improving by subjecting them to market forces.

Imitating similar programs begun last year in New York City and Washington, the organizers of the venture, known as the Children's Scholarship Fund, said they had already secured commitments of $140 million, including $50 million each from two founding board members. They are Theodore J. Forstmann, a senior partner in Forstmann Little & Company, an investment firm, and the chairman of Gulfstream Aerospace, and John T. Walton, a director of Wal-Mart Stores Inc. and a son of Wal-Mart's founder, Sam Walton.

Their effort is one of the largest private investments on behalf of schoolchildren, second only to the $500 million that Walter H. Annenberg, the philanthropist, committed to public-education reform over five years, beginning in 1993.

The program announced yesterday, if fully financed, would also dwarf all of the private voucher programs that have sprouted in more than three dozen cities and towns in recent years, most of them in response to long-smoldering discontent among parents and businesses with the quality of public education.

The most comprehensive of those efforts is in San Antonio, Tex., where a local physician and a foundation that endorses vouchers have committed to sending every interested public-school student living below the poverty level to private or parochial school, beginning next fall, through the end of high school. The cost of that program, which is being offered to more than 13,000 schoolchildren, is estimated at $50 million over 10 years.

In announcing the voucher program yesterday in the New York Public Library, Mr. Forstmann and Mr. Walton were joined by Michael Ovitz, a major investor in Livent, an entertainment company, and the former president of Walt Disney Company, and Mayor Rudolph W. Giuliani, a graduate of the city's Catholic schools. The Mayor inspired a group of Wall Street executives to create the New York program last year.

Mr. Forstmann said that the extraordinary demand for the New York program — more than 40,000 applications for just 2,200 scholarships for the current school year and the next one — was all the evidence necessary to convince him that inner-city students craved alternatives to public schools.

Moreover, he said, the national voucher program would provide an outlet for businesses that are searching for new ways to invest in education and are frustrated that their financial commitments to many public schools have had little effect.

"I believe in public schools," said Mr. Forstmann, who attended only private schools, the Greenwich Country Day School in Greenwich, Conn., and later Phillips Academy in Andover, Mass. "But they're not working right in a lot of places. Money's not going to fix them."

The only way to motivate public schools to improve is to threaten them with the loss of their students, Mr. Forstmann said, echoing the philosophy of the voucher movement.

"Competition makes you better," he said. "If you have a totally free marketplace in anything, and you don't compete, you go broke. If you do compete, you prosper."

Like the voucher program in New York City, the new foundation expects to award its scholarships to low-income students by lottery, in as many as 50 cities. But unlike the New York group, which offers scholarships to students entering first through sixth grades, the new foundation will accept applications from low-income students in all grades.

While the New York organization, known as the School Choice Scholarship Foundation, has provided students with up to $1,400 annually, in some cases covering full tuition, the national foundation will ask parents to cover at least 25 percent of tuition and sometimes as much as 60 percent, depending on their means, Mr. Forstmann said. "They should own this," he said.

The national organization specified no limit on the amounts of individual awards, but estimated that the average tuition was $1,995 a year at private schools participating in existing voucher programs.

Mr. Forstmann said that the organization was seeking corporate and individual partners in large and small cities to match the $100 million that he and Mr. Walton had put up. He said the organization had commitments from patrons to raise $5 million or more in Los Angeles, New York, Chicago and Washington.

In New York, officials at the School Choice Scholarship Foundation, which has awarded $11 million in three-year scholarships over the last two years, said yesterday that they were considering a partnership with Mr. Forstmann's group. In Jersey City, N.J., Mayor Bret Schundler said he would personally contribute $25,000 in an effort to raise $400,000.

Those seeking to gain widespread acceptance for both privately and publicly financed vouchers embraced yesterday's announcement as a validation of their movement.

"This is a huge boost," said Clint Bolick, litigation director of the Institute for Justice, a public interest law firm that defends school voucher programs nationwide.

But the response was more measured from those who fear the encroachment of such efforts on public-education spending.

"These are wealthy people, and if this is where they want to put their money, who am I to argue," said Sandra Feldman, the president of the American Federation of Teachers. Like many educators, she opposes vouchers, contending that they siphon money from public schools. "I would much prefer to have seen a contribution like that made to the public schools, the way Walter Annenberg did," she said.

New York Times, June 11, 1998

WISCONSIN COURT UPHOLDS VOUCHERS IN CHURCH SCHOOLS

'SECULAR PURPOSE' CITED

Civil Libertarians and Teacher Unions Say They'll Appeal to U.S. Supreme Court

By ETHAN BRONNER

In the most significant legal decision yet on the growing use of school vouchers, the Wisconsin Supreme Court ruled yesterday that the City of Milwaukee could spend taxpayer money to send pupils to parochial or other religious schools.

Voting 4 to 2 to overturn a lower-court ruling, the state's high court said the Milwaukee Parental Choice Program did not violate Wisconsin's existing ban on spending state money for religious seminaries or the First Amendment's separation of church and state. The court said the program "has a secular purpose" and "will not have the primary effect of advancing religion."

Kevin J. Hasson, president of the Becket Fund for Religious Liberty in Washington, a public interest law firm promoting the expression of religious traditions, said the decision "is the latest example of the fact that common sense is returning to the law of religious liberty." Mr. Hasson added, "Courts no longer see religion as an allergen in the body politic but as a normal part of life in society."

Civil libertarians, upset at what they considered a radical departure in court interpretation of the First Amendment, and teachers' unions, lamenting the ruling as a blow to public schools, vowed an appeal to the United States Supreme Court. Some legal scholars said the decision could form the basis of a test case for the Supreme Court on the extent to which government can support parental choice in using public money to buy a religious school education.

The Wisconsin court said United States Supreme Court decisions made clear that the Constitution was not "violated every time money previously in the possession of a state is conveyed to a religious institution."

Quoting a 1971 United States Supreme Court ruling, the Wisconsin court said, "The simplistic argument that every form of financial aid to church-sponsored activity violates the Religion Clauses was rejected long ago."

By the rules of Milwaukee's Parental Choice Program, begun in 1990 and the first of the country's voucher programs, families below a certain income level can send their children to the school of their choice — public or private, kindergarten through 12th grade — with the tuition paid by the state government.

When religious schools were added to the list of choices in 1995, a change aimed at vastly increasing the program's size because Milwaukee has so many more parochial schools than private schools, the plan was challenged by the civil libertarians and teachers groups. Agreeing with them, a lower state court limited the program to private, nonsectarian schools.

About 1,500 children attend 23 private, nonsectarian schools in Milwaukee at public expense under the program. With the expansion approved by the court yesterday, about 13,500 additional poor students can to choose a parochial school starting in September. The program permits 15 percent of the public school population — currently 100,000 — to take part in the voucher program. Already, 81 religious schools in the city have registered to participate.

"We have 125 students eligible and waiting for vouchers," said Brother Bob Smith, principal of Messmer High School, a Roman Catholic school, which serves a mainly black and Hispanic part of Milwaukee. "We're going to have a capacity problem but it's a good problem to have."

Voucher programs are sprouting up around the country because of discontent with the public school systems, especially in urban areas that serve the poor. In such areas, the main alternative to public schools are those run by churches, and experts said that the Wisconsin decision, if repeated elsewhere, could remove the biggest obstacle to such plans.

On Tuesday, a group of business leaders, saying they hoped to move public schools to improve, pledged to raise $200 million for a national voucher program that would permit at least 50,000 poor, public-school students around the country to attend parochial and other private schools over the next four years.

Four other states — Ohio, Arizona, Vermont and Maine — have cases similar to Milwaukee's pending in their state courts. The winners in the Wisconsin case said the ruling provided the other programs with rationale and momentum.

"Today's decision will help school choice spread like wildfire across the nation," said Chip Mellor, president of Institute for Justice, a Washington-based conservative public policy law firm that represented the Milwaukee parents in the appeal. "The court's careful analysis of the constitutional issues provides powerful insight that voucher programs are fully compatible with the principles of the First Amendment."

Barry Lynn, executive director of the Americans United for Separation of Church and State, which helped bring the lawsuit stopping the program's implementation, said: "Taxpayers shouldn't be forced to pay for religious schools. The principal purpose of a religious school is to spread its teachings, whether they be the Gospel of Jesus Christ or the words of Mohammed. They are specific teachings from ministries of religious denominations. We are not throwing in the towel."

Phil Baum, executive director of the American Jewish Congress, who was upset by the ruling, said he foresaw "a possible landmark U.S. Supreme Court decision." Mr. Baum said the High Court would soon be confronted with a fundamental choice: "to preserve the principle that the Constitution imposes stringent and special restrictions on Government financing of religion — a policy which has allowed religion and religious liberty to flourish — or to embark on an uncharted course, and put at risk the religious liberty Americans enjoy."

The Wisconsin court said in its decision that a student qualifies for benefits under the amended Milwaukee program "not because he or she is a Catholic, a Jew, a Moslem, or an atheist; it is because he or she is from a poor family and is a student in the embattled Milwaukee Public Schools."

Sandra Feldman, president of the American Federation of Teachers, said it was "unconscionable to give public funds to private religious schools for just a few students, when those same tax dollars could be put into proven, public-school programs that would benefit every child in Milwaukee."

The advocates of voucher programs say that one of its great benefits is to force public school systems to face their failings and improve.

Mayor John O. Norquist of Milwaukee said the ruling would lead to higher quality public schools because "the district won't be able to take kids for granted.

In New York City, advocates for publicly financed vouchers said that the Wisconsin decision revived at least the prospect that such programs might be tested someday in the city's poorest neighborhoods. But they said it was far too soon to know whether anyone would propose such a program.

The most important legal decision yet on the increasing use of school vouchers.

Some scholars who have been watching the legal battles over vouchers expressed surprise that the Wisconsin judges went beyond state constitutional questions and directly addressed the First Amendment.

"It was a big surprise that they took on the First Amendment," said Joseph P. Viteritti, a professor of public administration at New York University, who is writing a book on school choice. Professor Viteritti said the key to yesterday's ruling was the court's view that the voucher money went to the parents rather than the schools and that its purpose was neutral with regard to religion.

He and other scholars who favor school choice said the Wisconsin decision was well-grounded in the past two decades of High Court decisions on the subject.

Few issues have been as divisive or murky at the Supreme Court as the meaning of the First Amendment's assertion that "Congress shall make no law respecting an establishment of religion, or prohibiting the free exercise thereof."

The mandate, which applies equally to state legislatures by virtue of the 14th Amendment, has, since a 1971 High Court case, been interpreted to mean that a law must pass a three-prong test: it has a secular purpose; its primary effect neither advances nor inhibits religion; it does not create excessive entanglement between government and religion."

The 68-page ruling of the Wisconsin Supreme Court said the Milwaukee school choice program met all three criteria. The two dissenting judges, who included Chief Justice Shirley S. Abrahamson, did not take issue with that portion of the decision. In a short paragraph the dissenters said simply that they agreed with the appellate court decision saying the program violated Wisconsin's constitution.

The program has a provision prohibiting a private school from requiring a student attending it to participate in any religious activity if the pupil's parent or guardian submits a written request that he or she be exempted.

That did not satisfy the plan's opponents, who said religious indoctrination would occur anyway. Gov. Tommy Thompson of Wisconsin, a long-standing proponent of school vouchers, said yesterday: "Religious values aren't our problem. Drop-out rates and low test scores are."

In the fall of 1996, in response to a challenge from John Cardinal O'Connor, Mayor Rudolph W. Giuliani had briefly considered using tax dollars to send 1,000 low-performing public-school students to parochial schools, saying he was confident he could defend such a program before the United States Supreme Court. But he quickly retreated, saying that such a plan would be "clearly illegal."

The program that later resulted, which has so far awarded four-year scholarships to parochial or other private schools to 2,200 New York City public-school children, was financed entirely by corporate and other private donations.

Education Week, June 17, 1998

Excerpts From the Ruling

Following are excerpts from the Wisconsin Supreme Court's majority opinion in *Jackson* v. *Benson:*

The first issue we address is whether the amended MPCP [Milwaukee Parental Choice Program] violates the Establishment Clause of the First Amendment to the United States Constitution. Neither the circuit court nor the court of appeals reached this issue. Upon review we conclude that the amended MPCP does not violate the Establishment Clause because it has a secular purpose, it will not have the primary effect of advancing religion, and it will not lead to excessive entanglement between the State and participating sectarian private schools. ...

The [U.S.] Supreme Court, in cases culminating in *Agostini* [v. *Felton*], has established the general principle that state educational assistance programs do not have the primary effect of advancing religion if those programs provide public aid to both sectarian and nonsectarian institutions (1) on the basis of neutral, secular criteria that neither favor nor disfavor religion; and (2) only as a result of numerous private choices of the individual parents of school-age children. The amended MPCP is precisely such a program. ...

Eligibility for benefits under the amended MPCP is determined by "neutral, secular criteria that neither favor nor disfavor religion," and aid "is made available to both religious and secular beneficiaries on a nondiscriminatory basis." Pupils are eligible under the amended MPCP if they reside in Milwaukee, attend public schools (or private schools in grades K-3) and meet certain income requirements. Beneficiaries are then selected on a random basis from all those pupils who apply and meet these religious-neutral criteria. Participating private schools are also selected on a religious-neutral basis and may be sectarian or nonsectarian. The participating private schools must select on a random basis the students attending their schools under the amended program, except that they may give preference to siblings already accepted in the school. In addition, under the new "opt-out" provision, the private schools cannot require the students participating in the program to participate in any religious activity provided at that school.

Under the amended MPCP, beneficiaries are eligible for an equal share of per pupil public aid regardless of the school they choose to attend. To those eligible pupils and parents who participate, the amended MPCP provides a religious-neutral benefit—the opportunity "to choose the educational opportunities that they deem best for their children." The amended MPCP, in conjunction with existing state educational programs, gives participating parents the choice to send their children to a neighborhood public school, a different public school within the district, a specialized public school, a private nonsectarian school, or a private sectarian school. As a result, the amended program is in no way "skewed towards religion."

The amended MPCP therefore satisfies the principle of neutrality required by the Establishment Clause. ... A student qualifies for benefits under the amended MPCP not because he or she is a Catholic, a Jew, a Moslem, or an atheist; it is because he or she is from a poor family and is a student in the embattled Milwaukee Public Schools. Because it provides a neutral benefit to beneficiaries selected on religious-neutral criteria, the amended MPCP neither leads to "religious indoctrination," nor "creates [a] financial incentive for students to undertake sectarian education." ...

The amended MPCP, therefore, places on equal footing options of public and private school choice, and vests power in the hands of parents to choose where to direct the funds allocated for their children's benefit.. ...

Since the amended MPCP has a secular purpose, does not have the primary effect of advancing religion, and does not create an excessive entanglement, it is not invalid under the Establishment Clause.

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New York Times, June 11, 1998

Excerpts From Ruling on Use of Education Money

Following are excerpts from the decision issued yesterday by the Wisconsin Supreme Court on the Milwaukee Parental Choice Program allowing the city to use public money to send children to parochial or other religious schools. The text was obtained from the Web site of The Milwaukee Journal.

The first issue we address is whether the amended M.P.C.P. violates the Establishment Clause of the First Amendment to the United States Constitution. Neither the circuit court nor the court of appeals reached this issue. Upon review we conclude that the amended M.P.C.P. does not violate the Establishment Clause because it has a secular purpose, it will not have the primary effect of advancing religion, and it will not lead to excessive entanglement between the State and participating sectarian private schools.

The First Amendment to the United States Constitution provides in part that "Congress shall make no law respecting an establishment of religion, or prohibiting the free exercise thereof." This mandate applies equally to state legislatures by virtue of the Due Process Clause of the 14th Amendment. The Establishment Clause, therefore, prohibits state governments from passing laws which have either the purpose or effect of advancing or inhibiting religion.

When assessing any First Amendment challenge to a state statute, we are bound by the results and interpretations given that amendment by the decisions of the United States Supreme Court. . . .

The Supreme Court has repeatedly recognized that the Establishment Clause raises difficult issues of interpretation, and cases arising under it "have presented some of the most perplexing questions to come before [the] Court." We are therefore cognizant of the Court's warnings that:

"There are always risks in treating criteria discussed by the Court from time to time as 'tests' in any limiting sense of that term. Constitutional adjudication does not lend itself to the absolutes of the physical sciences or mathematics. . . . [C]andor compels the acknowledgment that we can only dimly perceive the boundaries of permissible government activity in this sensitive area of constitutional adjudication."

In an attempt to focus on the three main evils from which the Establishment Clause was intended to afford protection: sponsorship, financial support, and active involvement of the sovereign in religious activity, the Court has promulgated a three-pronged test to determine whether a statute complies with the Establishment Clause. Under this test, a statute does not violate the Establishment Clause if (1) it has a secular legislative purpose; (2) its principal or primary effect neither advances nor inhibits religion, and (3) it does not create excessive entanglement between government and religion. We must apply this three-part test to determine the constitutionality of Wisconsin Statute 119.23.

Under the first prong of the Lemon test, we examine whether the purpose of the state legislation is secular in nature. Our analysis of the amended M.P.C.P. under this prong of the Lemon test is straightforward. Courts have been "reluctan[t] to attribute unconstitutional motives to the states, particularly when a plausible secular purpose for the state's program may be discerned from the face of the statute."

A state's decision to defray the cost of educational expenses incurred by parents — regardless of the type of schools their children attend — evidences a purpose that is both secular and understandable. An educated populace is essential to the political and economic health of any community, and a state's efforts to assist parents in meeting the rising cost of educational expenses plainly serves this secular purpose of insuring that the state's citizenry is well-educated. . . .

Analysis of the amended program under the second prong of the Lemon test is more difficult. While the first prong of Lemon examines the legislative purpose of the challenged statute, the second prong focuses on its likely effect. A law violates the Establishment Clause if its principal or primary effect either advances or inhibits religion. . . .

The Supreme Court, in cases culminating in Agostini, has established the general principle that state educational assistance programs do not have the primary effect of advancing religion if those programs provide public aid to both sectarian and nonsectarian institutions (1) on the basis of neutral, secular criteria that neither favor nor disfavor religion; and (2) only as a result of numerous private choices of the individual parents of school-age children. The amended M.P.C.P. is precisely such a program. Applying to the amended M.P.C.P. the criteria the Court has developed from Everson to Agostini, we conclude that the program does not have the primary effect of advancing religion. . . .

The final question for us to determine under the Lemon test is whether the amended M.P.C.P. would result in an excessive governmental entanglement with religion. Stated another way, it is necessary to determine whether "[a] comprehensive, discriminating, and continuing state surveillance will inevitably be required to ensure that these restrictions [against the inculcation of religious tenets] are obeyed and the First Amendment otherwise respected." . . .

The amended M.P.C.P. will not create an excessive entanglement between the state and religion. Under the amended program, the state need not, and in fact is not given the authority to impose a "comprehensive, discriminating, and continuing state surveillance" over the participating sectarian private schools. . . .

The program does not involve the state in any way with the schools' governance, curriculum, or day-to-day affairs. The state's regulation of participating private schools, while designed to insure that the program's educational purposes are fulfilled, does not approach the level of constitutionally impermissible involvement.

In short, we hold that the amended M.P.C.P., which provides a neutral benefit directly to children of economically disadvantaged families on a religious-neutral basis, does not run afoul of any of the three primary criteria the Court has traditionally used to evaluate whether a state educational assistance program has the purpose or effect of advancing religion. Since the amended M.P.C.P. has a secular purpose, does not have the primary effect of advancing religion, and does not create an excessive entanglement, it is not invalid under the Establishment Clause.

Education Week, June 17, 1998

Voucher Plans Surface in Hearing on Head Start Reauthorization

By Linda Jacobson

Voucher proposals emerged as a topic of debate last week at the second hearing this year on the reauthorization of Head Start, the government's 33-year-old preschool program for poor children.

Rep. John L. Mica, R-Fla., who testified before the House Subcommittee on Early Childhood, Youth, and Families on June 9, would like to see a limited voucher system in which children would be allowed to use federal funding to leave regular Head Start programs, which are run by nonprofit community agencies, to attend other early-childhood programs.

Local school boards would have to approve non-Head Start programs—which could include for-profit entities—where Head Start funding could be used.

Private programs can operate with less money per child, he argued, calling Head Start an "inflexible, costly, and sometimes unresponsive bureaucracy."

And Wade Horn, the president of the Gaithersburg, Md.-based National Fatherhood Initiative, proposed in his testimony that Congress set up a demonstration program in which a randomly selected group of Head Start graduates would receive tuition vouchers to use at public or private elementary schools.

"I now champion the use of school choice as the impetus for fundamental school reform," he said in his written comments to the subcommittee. Mr. Horn, whose organization promotes responsible fatherhood, served in the Bush administration as commissioner of the Administration on Children, Youth, and Families.

Advocates for the federal preschool program countered that allowing children who are eligible for Head Start to attend other preschool programs with a voucher could compromise the quality of the services they receive.

Wade Horn

"How would they enforce the performance standards?" said Townley Hritz, the associate director of government affairs for the Alexandria, Va.-based National Head Start Association, referring to the detailed guidelines that Head Start grantees are required to meet.

State agencies that license child-care and early-education programs already have a hard time monitoring the programs under their authority, she said.

Michael Kharfen, a spokesman for the Department of Health and Human Services, which oversees Head Start, declined to comment on the voucher proposals in an interview. But he added that the administration's goals of serving 1 million children by 2002 and of building upon changes made during the 1994 reauthorization of the program haven't changed.

President Clinton is asking for $4.7 billion in the fiscal 1999 budget for Head Start and Early Head Start, which serves infants and toddlers. Head Start, with a current budget of almost $4 billion, now serves about 800,000 children. *(See Education Week, April 1, 1998.)*

Meanwhile, last week in the Senate, the subcommittee on children and families completed its draft of the Human Services Reauthorization Act of 1998, which covers Head Start. That bill would encourage greater collaboration between Head Start and other early-education programs by providing waivers on a few select requirements, require English as the primary language of instruction, and state that one of the purposes of Head Start is to promote school readiness, particularly in the areas of literacy and numeracy. Also included are plans for a two-year, national impact study of the program and a move toward evaluating the progress of children in local programs.

Rep. John L. Mica

Concerns Over Curriculum

At a joint House-Senate hearing held in March, the first hearing on reauthorizing Head Start, Rep. Frank Riggs, a Republican from California who chairs the House early-childhood subcommittee, indicated that he was interested in seeing more large-scale research on Head Start and strengthening the academic content of the program, particularly the portion that focuses on early reading skills.

The curriculum issue received more attention at last week's hearing.

Edward Zigler, the director of the Yale Bush Center in Child Development and Social Policy in New Haven, Ct., and one of the founders of Head Start, said that, because the government doesn't mandate that a certain curriculum be used, the educational aspect of the program is sometimes weak.

"What type of curriculum works best, with which students, is an empirical question, and it is time that we answered it empirically," he wrote in his testimony.

And Catherine Snow, a professor of education at Harvard University, said that Head Start has missed an opportunity to provide rich literacy experiences for students, even though poor children are more likely to develop early reading problems. Head Start standards are explicit on health, cleanliness, and safety issues, she said, but not on language and literacy.

Rep. Riggs has also said he is interested in seeing better coordination between Head Start and state welfare-reform efforts.

Republicans and Democrats alike have contended that Head Start is increasingly out of step with the families the program is meant to serve, largely because the program traditionally operates only half a day and only during the school year.

They note that low-income parents—because of work requirements within the 1996 welfare overhaul—are now in greater need of full-day programs.

New York Times, **June 19, 1998**

New York City is to Use Public Funds for Private Pre-Kindergarten Classes

By Somini Sengupta

With less than three months left before 14,000 four-year-olds are supposed to begin new pre-kindergarten classes established by the state, New York City's overcrowded public school system is planning to enroll a third of those children in private and parochial preschools. Unable to squeeze the preschoolers into public schools ripping at the seams, officials expect to use public funds to educate about 5,000 children in private schools. It is a rare example of the city's public school system relying on the private sector for basic academic services; the only precedents are smaller programs in counseling and tutoring.

The state law that established pre-kindergarten classes encouraged local school districts to draw up contracts with private preschools. The law requires each district to devote at least 10 percent of its funds to contracts with private agencies, and education officials in Albany said the requirement was added because they knew many districts would be unable to find the space or the qualified teachers on their own. The private preschool industry, worried about losing business, also lobbied heavily in Albany.

When state lawmakers enacted the law establishing the $500 million program last summer, they allocated money for teachers and aides, but none for construction, despite the space problem. Since then, translating the language of the law into reality has flummoxed school officials across the state, especially in New York City, which now expects to be spending 35% of its state allocation for the program on private and parochial schools.

In some areas of the city, parents have been unable to submit applications for their preschoolers because district officials have not picked the private preschools they will use. Bathrooms and playgrounds are still being inspected, teacher credentials reviewed and classrooms observed. As school officials have discovered, conditions at private preschools vary widely. Dirty floors and a dearth of books at a day care center on the ground floor of an East New York housing project dismayed one superintendent, while the emphasis on penmanship at a preschool in northern Queens troubled another district official, who considered the school's approach too rigid.

And recently, a new complication was unearthed: When a Brooklyn superintendent showed up to inspect a yeshiva, it was closed for a religious holiday, revealing the potential chaos that mismatched school calendars could create for working parents.

Still, most educators unequivocally embrace the concept of preschool education, not just in New York but around the country. A survey taken last year by the Children's Defense Fund, an advocacy group based in Washington, found that 21 states had increased financing of preschool programs, most of them intended for poor children. Last year, the New Jersey Legislature set aside $125 million for pre-kindergarten classes in 125 of the state's poorest school districts. In Connecticut, lawmakers agreed last year to spend $86 million over two years on pre-kindergarten classes in more than a dozen poor, mostly urban districts.

"Who can say anything bad about children having early-childhood education?" said Dr. Arthur Greenberg, the head of Community School District 25 in Flushing, Queens. "Is it well planned? No. I know a whole bunch of superintendents who would have liked more time to get this off the ground." When the universal pre-kindergarten law was enacted a year ago, it drew bipartisan support from lawmakers, and got a strong boost from Lieut. Gov. Betsy McCaughey Ross. The program is voluntary for parents. New York City's Board of Education voted to require each of its 32 districts to provide the classes.

Champions of the program cited research pointing to the long-term benefits of early education. For instance, students of Head Start, the federally financed pre-kindergarten program for poor children, showed that preschoolers enrolled in the program initially showed measurable improvements in health, school attendance and cognitive test scores. The gains in cognitive test scores, however, faded after a couple of years.

To stretch its resources, New York City decided to establish half-day pre-kindergarten classes; a few other districts in the state are creating full-day programs. The program is financed with $46 million in state funds for the 1998-99 school year, matched by $5 million from the Board of Education. Unlike Head Start, which is limited to needy children, New York's pre-kindergarten program is available to children regardless of their family income, though in the first year only districts with the largest percentage of poor children—including all New York City districts—are eligible.

Private preschools that want contracts with the city school system must be licensed by the city, and they cannot offer religious instruction. Any parochial schools involved in the new program will, under the state law, have to scrub classroom walls of religious icons and agree to a secular curriculum. Given the stipulations, several private agencies, including schools run by the Roman Catholic Archdiocese of New York, have passed up the offer.

"We are in the business of religious education," said Dr. Catherine Hickey, superintendent o f schools for the archdiocese, which has more than 6,000 children in preOkindergarten classes. "We probably would not sacrifice one of our own religious early-childhood programs for the sake of secular programs."

The privatization issue has not drawn opposition from the teachers' union. An estimated 225 teachers will be hired to instruct children in pre-kindergarten.

"Obviously, I would prefer it in the public schools," said Ronald C. Jones, the United Federation of Teachers vice president for elementary schools. "Until we get to that nirvana, I don't think we should deprive these kids of pre-K."

The New York Civil Liberties Union has pledged to watch closely as the arrangement is carried out. Although enrollment is optional for parents, each of the city's school districts will be required to accommodate 16% of their estimated population of 4-year-olds, or a citywide total of 14,000 children. Five of the most overcrowded districts have yet to find room in their buildings or in private preschools to accommodate their share of pre-kindergartners in the fall, though Board of Education officials say they are optimistic that room will be found soon.

Those five are District 6 in upper Manhattan, Districts 9 and 11 in the Bronx and Districts 24 and 29 in Queens.

Most districts are selecting students either by lottery or on a fir-come-first-served basis. The state law mandates that districts gradually expand the number of slots so that by fall 2002, any 4-year-old can enroll in a pre-kindergarten class. But accommodating all children whose parents want them in the program by 2002 is likely to be a formidable challenge, given the lack of new school buildings and parallel state legislation requiring cuts in class size beginning in fall 1999.

For pre-kindergarten alone, 30,000 seats, or 1,750 classrooms, would have to be built or found by 2002, according to estimates by the Board of Education. To reduce class size, 45,552 more seats—more than 2,000 classrooms—would be required. This fall, the board will open six new schools with about 5,000 seats.

"The facilities part is a major factor that has been overlooked," said J.D. LaRock, a board spokesman. District 19 on the eastern fringe of Brooklyn, for example, has little room for pre-kindergarten in its Cypress Hills neighborhood, the densely populated northern part of the district where schools are already so crowded that kindergartners are bused to Starrett City, several miles south.

Touring his district and looking for pre-kindergarten space the other day, Superintendent Robert E. Riccobono said he wondered whether parents in Cypress Hills would shepherd their children to the southern end of the district, where there is ample space for pre-kindergarten: Within a two-block radius in Starrett City, he had found a public school that could house a couple of pre-kindergarten classes, as well as a yeshiva and a secular preschool.

But space is not the sole concern. Although licensed private preschools, like the public schools, have state-certified early-childhood teachers, there is a great variety in the conditions and philosophy of each preschool. On a tour the other day, Mr. Riccobono found one preschool, on the ground floor of a housing project in the East New York section of Brooklyn, practically devoid of books and instructional supplies and floors that needed a thorough cleaning.

Still, he chose the preschool after concluding that the problems were easily fixable.

"Don't forget, we are responsible," Mr. Riccobono said. "It's not comfortable to be responsible for something you can't control."

Around the state 124 or 700 schools districts—those with the largest share of poor children—are eligible in the first year, and of those, 80 are participating. School districts will be phased in based on their percentage of poor children, and by the fourth year, all districts will be eligible. Other districts are also facing problems implementing the program. In small, growing cities like Gloversville, west of Albany, school officials are having trouble finding enough school buildings or licensed day care centers to accommodate the rising student enrollment, state education officials said. In East Aurora, in western New York, school districts are negotiating with a mammoth day care center run by the toy company Fisher Price. Several cities are looking for empty rooms in state buildings. In New York City, the demand for the state-financed pre-kindergarten classes is hard to gauge, though it is well known that the day-care crunch is particularly intense for the city's working poor: There are 36,000 children on a waiting list for city-subsidized day care slots.

Wall Street Journal, June 15, 1998

Why I'm Reluctantly Backing Vouchers

By Arthur Levine

Throughout my career, I have been an opponent of school voucher programs. I disapproved of them because I feared they would undermine public schools. They also threatened to diminish the teaching of universal democratic values by supporting parochial and ideologically based schools. Studies of the limited experiments conducted with vouchers and school choice in the U.S. showed these options were used disproportionately by relatively affluent families, raising the concern that vouchers could turn our public schools into ghettos for the poor. In addition, the research showed vouchers produce little if any improvement in student achievement, but result in higher educational costs.

However, after much soul-searching, I have reluctantly concluded that a limited school voucher program is now essential for the poorest Americans attending the worst public schools.

Despite a 15-year-long national school-improvement movement, many urban public schools are still falling apart physically and produce dismal results when it comes to teaching students. These schools show no signs of improving; some are even deteriorating. They are the worst schools in America. Walking through their halls, one meets students without hope and teachers without expectations. These schools damage children; they rob them of their futures. No parent should be forced to send a child to such a school. No student should be compelled to attend one.

Today these schools are effectively reserved for the urban poor. More-affluent parents have other options--private schools, suburban schools or better public schools. As never before in American history, we live in an age in which the future of our children is inextricably tied to the quality of the education they receive. In the past, a school dropout or a less-educated American could find a job in manufacturing or in one of the service professions, earning wages adequate to support a family. Those jobs have all but disappeared. Today, to force children into inadequate schools is to deny them any chance of success. To do so simply on the basis of their parents' income is a sin.

What I am proposing is a rescue operation aimed at reclaiming the lives of America's most disadvantaged children. This would involve a limited voucher program focusing on poor, urban children attending the bottom 10% of public schools. Their families would be reimbursed an amount equal to the cost per student of public education (a national average of roughly $6,500) to allow them to attend a better school. These schools could be nonsectarian private schools or better public schools in the suburbs. The money could even be used to create better urban public-school alternatives.

The voucher rescue would aim to accomplish three goals. Most important, it would offer poor children a way out of the worst schools. If the research on vouchers is correct, not nearly as many as one would hope will choose this option. However, many will--and that is all that matters.

Second, it will become possible to shut down some of the poor schools abandoned by students with vouchers. This will permit urban public school districts to concentrate their resources on more promising and effective schools.

Third, the vouchers could encourage the creation of strong urban schools. This could happen as entrepreneurs and private companies such as the Edison Project follow the dollars and establish private inner-city schools. It could happen if urban public school districts decide to replace old schools with better ones so that they can compete for students. In any case, schools receiving voucher funding should be required to meet serious performance standards. They need to be accountable both fiscally and academically.

This is a painful proposal for me to offer. In making it I am departing from the views of most of my colleagues at Teachers College and of educators across the nation, whom I deeply respect. I do so only in response to a desperate situation. I offer it not as a convert to vouchers, but as an individual who thinks in this one instance they may be the only way to save the most disadvantaged children. I offer this proposal not as a detractor of public schools, but as a champion who wants them to be as strong as they can be.

Mr. Levine is president of Teachers College, Columbia University.

Policy Review, May/June 1998

Blocking *the* Exits

Libertarian opposition to school vouchers is an attack on freedom

By Clint Bolick

What do many thoughtful, committed libertarians and Sandra Feldman of the American Federation of Teachers union have in common? Almost nothing—except their opposition to school choice. Answering the concerns of these libertarians is essential to defeating the reactionary likes of Feldman and realizing the potential of school choice.

School vouchers empower parents to spend their public education funds in public, private, or religious schools. The cause of choice unites conservatives, most libertarians, and growing numbers of centrists and even liberals. It brings together disparate reformers because all at once it expands parental autonomy, increases competition, promotes educational equity, and addresses the greatest challenge facing America today: ensuring educational opportunities for low-income children in the inner cities.

Some libertarians fear, however, that school vouchers will not expand freedom, but will instead turn the private schools that serve roughly 11 percent of America's youngsters into clones of failed government schools. That price, they argue, is too high, even for the sake of expanding the private sector in education and improving opportunities for millions of youngsters who desperately need them.

I wish the school-choice naysayers could have shared my experiences with the public-school monopoly and the choice alternative. My original career aspiration was classroom teaching; remarkably, upon my graduation from college, the New Jersey education cartel conferred upon me lifetime teacher certification. But my experiences as a student teacher left me convinced that our system of public K-12 education desperately needed fundamental change. I concluded, first, that parents, not bureaucrats, should control essential education decisions; and second, that a system of parental choice should replace the command-and-control system of public education in America.

For a long time school choice held only academic interest for me, but I became downright militant about the issue in 1990, when I had the honor of defending the constitutionality of the nation's first school-choice program, in Milwaukee. I walked the hallways of the schools that 1,000 economically disadvantaged children were able to at-

Hope Academy photo by Jack Orton / *Milwaukee Journal Sentinel*; Marva Collins photo by Tom Lynn / *Milwaukee Journal Sentinel*

tend for the first time. I talked to their parents, most of whom were themselves poorly educated yet keenly understood that this was a chance—perhaps the only chance—for their children to have a better life. And I saw the beaming faces of children—beacons of pride, self-discipline, and hope. That's when school choice became a matter of heart and soul as well as mind.

The nation's second school-choice program, launched in Cleveland in 1995, had an equally profound effect on me. It has permanently etched the figure "one in 14" in my memory. You see, children in the Cleveland Public Schools have a one-in-14 chance of graduating on schedule with senior-level proficiency. They also have a one-in-14 chance, each year, of being victimized by crime in their school. When a school district can offer its children no greater chance of learning the skills they need to become responsible citizens than of being victimized by crime during the school day, we are in serious jeopardy.

The Specter of Regulation

I do not mean to diminish the ever-present specter of government regulation of private schools. When it was enacted in 1990, Milwaukee's school-choice program was not only challenged in court, but also sentenced to death by bureaucratic strangulation. The education establishment insisted that private schools meet all state and federal regulations applicable to public schools. Not surprisingly, every single private school refused to participate under those conditions. We fought these regulations in court even as we were defending the program's constitutionality.

The regulatory threat from federal school-choice proposals is even more ominous. For example, when some members of Congress proposed parental-choice legislation for the District of Columbia last year, we found ourselves battling to head off all manner of federal regulations on participating private schools.

Though we won both these skirmishes, we know the regulatory threat is serious. But these episodes suggest caution, not abandonment, of this freedom enterprise. The position of school-choice critics is akin to resisting the demise of communism because the free markets that would emerge might be subjected to government regulation. This is hardly a Hobson's choice.

Virtually all libertarian arguments against parental choice are grounded in hypothetical speculation. And the greatest antidote to speculation is reality. But even the critics' worst case does not trump the value of choice. The critics of choice point to the example of American higher education as the ultimate horror story of government control. In the 1980s, the U.S. Supreme Court ruled that postsecondary institutions that accept any federal funds—even student loan guarantees—must also submit to federal regulation. So federal regulators have now ensnared all but a handful of fiercely independent private colleges.

But from the standpoint of our current system of elementary and secondary education, this so-called nightmare looks more like a dream. Libertarian alarmists warn that vouchers will lead to a system of primary and secondary schools under monolithic government control. But that's exactly what we have already! Only 11 percent of America's children attend independent elementary and secondary schools, while 89 percent attend government schools. Moreover, private schools already are subject to regulations concerning health and safety, nondiscrimination, the length of the school year, curriculum content, and the like.

In my view, our overwhelming concern should be for those children who are already captive of the educational standards and ideological dogma of the public-school monolith. Surely any reform that diminishes the near-monopoly status of government schooling—even at the cost of greater regulation of private schools—will still yield a net increase in freedom. We should be particularly confident of that outcome when the mechanism of reform is a transfer of power over educational decisions from bureaucrats to parents.

Moreover, the regulatory threat to private-school independence is simply not illuminated by reference to higher education. In that instance, federal oversight entered an arena of vibrant competition between a vigorous and effective public sector and a vigorous and effective private sector. The horizons for elementary and secondary schools, by contrast, are limited by a dominant, overregulated, and ineffective public sector. The likely main outcome of expanding access to the highly effective, lightly regulated private sector will be to deregulate the public sector.

And that is exactly what we are seeing. The mere prospect of school choice has already sparked deregulation of public schools. In Milwaukee, efforts to increase regulation of private schools have failed, while the public sector has responded to choice by allowing more flexibility in the management of public schools and passing two charter-school statutes. In Arizona, a 1994 parental choice proposal in the state legislature failed by just a few votes, but a "compromise" produced the nation's most ambitious charter-school legislation. Today, one-sixth of public schools in Arizona are charter schools, many of which are operated by private nonprofit and for-profit entities.

The Marketplace Meets the Classroom

Parental choice is the cornerstone of market-oriented education reforms. If we liberate public education funding from the grip of school districts and let children take it wherever they go, we will create a dynamic educational marketplace. I predict that, if we expand these reforms across the nation, then public schools will quickly lose their eight-to-one advantage in enrollment. Instead we will enjoy a system of choice among government schools, quasi-public charter schools, quasi-private charter schools, and private schools; in sum, a system far more free than the command-and-control system to which the overwhelming majority of America's children are confined today.

I would remind critics of choice that other safeguards support a firewall against excessive regulation. First, private schools can decide for themselves whether to accept choice funding from the government. In Milwaukee, when choice was expanded to religious schools, they were all forced to think long and hard about participating and accepting the modest regulations imposed by the program. In the end, more than 100 of 122 private schools in the city agreed to participate. Critics worry that schools may be unwisely tempted by the prospect of funding, or that they will tolerate rising regulation after becoming dependent on the funding. For the many inner-city schools that are approaching insolvency, this may not be a bad deal. But that is a choice that the schools should be trusted to make on their own—and anti-voucher libertarians who argue otherwise are indulging in uncharacteristic paternalism.

Some schools will exercise their fundamental right not to participate. At the elementary and secondary level, many families can afford the median private tuition of $2,500 to $3,500. We always will have private schools that thrive outside of a choice system, and we should vigorously protect those schools. But that is not a sound basis for denying opportunity to children who cannot afford a private school education but desperately need it.

A second safeguard is the U.S. Constitution itself. First Amendment precedents forbid "excessive entanglement" between the state and religious schools. If regulations supplant essential school autonomy, they will be struck down.

Perhaps most important, the power of the education establishment will diminish in exact proportion to the power gained by parents. The education establishment fights every meaningful parental choice proposal as if its very survival depends on it—because it does.

The more zealous and irresponsible libertarian critics oppose vouchers because they wish to see the system of government-run schools collapse altogether. The reality is that the public funding of education enjoys nearly unanimous public support. The most extreme libertarians are missing—indeed, helping to defeat—the chance to end the government-school monopoly and to allow public education to take place outside the public sector.

For some of the kids involved, getting out of inner-city public schools is literally a matter of life and death. Many of my libertarian opponents on this issue are people of enormous good will, but when I see them blocking the exits for these children, I cannot look upon them with affection. I understand, even share, their concerns about government's destructive power. But I do not understand why they fail to see where the interests of freedom lie in this fight.

The fear of government regulation is valid, but not a sound basis for denying opportunity to children who desperately need a private-school education.

To them I say: When you actively oppose parental choice, please know what you are doing. You are aiding and abetting the most reactionary forces in American society. They trot you out and use you to preserve the status quo. It is a perverse spectacle.

Ted Kennedy . . . Jesse Jackson . . . Kweisi Mfume . . . Eleanor Holmes Norton . . . Norman Lear . . . Bill Clinton . . . Richard Riley . . . Keith Geiger . . . Sandra Feldman . . . Bob Chase. Among those enemies of change, my fellow libertarians do not belong, for they want what I want: freedom. I believe that a system of parental choice would mark the greatest domestic expansion of freedom in this century.

Friends, come over to the freedom side.

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Washington Monthly, May 1998

A Vital Compromise

It's time to give vouchers a try in our worst public schools

By Richard Whitmire

REMINDERS OF THE SORRY STATE OF our urban public schools wash over us daily in waves of headlines about high failure rates, collapsing school buildings, and incompetent teachers. Meanwhile, the politicized debate between private-school voucher proponents and public-school defenders has become almost as numbing as the stories of school failure. As an education reporter for a national chain of newspapers, I have found the rhetoric on both sides to be at odds with the reality. Caught up in the ferocity of the debate, many advocates seem to have lost touch with the basic question that should be at the root of reform: What are the ingredients of a successful school in a poor district?

Let's start with Houston's Roosevelt Elementary, a jewel of a school in a neighborhood strewn with barbed wire and broken glass. This is an area where children arrive unable to identify colors, let alone letters. An astonishing 41 percent of the school's families move every year and 60 percent of the children come from single-parent homes. In short, Roosevelt has all the makings of a horror story headline school. But since arriving five years ago, principal Charlotte Parker has fired up her staff, muscled the district bureaucrats aside to win more teacher planning time, and taken on the nationally acclaimed "Success for All" reading program. By the 4th grade you can barely tell her kids apart from their suburban counterparts on the TAAS, the Texas Assessment of Academic Skills. Privately, I put the school to the parent test: Would I send my two school-age daughters here? No problem.

Shortly after my visit to Houston, I decided to check out Loyola Catholic Grade School in Denver, which draws on the same inner-city children the Denver public schools are serving so erratically. In exchange for a laughably small annual tuition of $1,950, the children who spend a few years under the strict tutelage of Principal Sister Mary Ellen Roach leave well educated, well disciplined, and motivated. And, yes, they also look great on the Iowa Test of Basic Skills: Loyola third graders, nearly all black, score in the 72nd percentile in math and the fifth graders score in the 76th percentile in reading. Same question: To avoid one of Denver's lousy public schools would I prefer to send my children to a school run by Sister Mary Ellen? Absolutely.

The good work of Charlotte Parker proves the teachers unions right when they say there are good public schools out there. And the equally impressive work of Sister Mary Ellen Roach shows voucher advocates right in saying some children fare better in private schools. There has to be a grand compromise here, a way out of the all-or-nothing voucher debate, a third way that focuses on the inner-city children who need help the most and allows both public and private schools to flourish.

Thanks to New York philanthropist Virginia Gilder, we have a glimpse of a possible grand compromise in Albany's Giffen Memorial Elementary. Located in one of Albany's saddest neighborhoods, practically in the shadow of the state capital, Giffen

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was a mess just a year ago, with unruly, crowded classes where children learned little: Less than a half the third graders were meeting minimum state reading standards.

Here's what Gilder offered the Giffen parents: Choose any private school you wish and I will guarantee tuition up to $2,000 a year. That set off a mad scramble that lasted for months, with the school district crying foul and minority parents debating an offer that smelled suspiciously like right-wing raw meat. It's still too early to draw a final conclusion about the Giffen experiment — or the other voucher programs being funded by philanthropists in urban areas such as Washington, D.C., and Los Angeles. So far 13 children have returned to Giffen, many for disciplinary problems they faced in private schools. And Catholic elementary and middle schools aren't always an option: 40 percent now have waiting lists. But most of the families of the roughly 100 children in the Giffen voucher program appear pleased. "It's wonderful," says Jennifer Davis, whose first-grade son, Brandon, attends St. James Institute, a Catholic elementary school. Not only has Brandon learned to read English, but he's also excited about the Spanish course he takes there. Parents who decided to keep their children at Giffen also have reason to cheer. The Albany school district brought in a vibrant, motivated principal — who sounds a lot like Houston's Charlotte Parker — along with two new assistant principals. The district also transferred seven teachers out of the school, invested $125,000 in fresh materials, established community outreach and literacy programs, and is considering bringing in the highly regarded "Success for All" program to boost reading skills.

Albany school officials, however, are loath to admit the voucher program brought about even a single reform. The most Giffen's new principal, Maxine Fantroy-Ford, will budge on that question is to say, "I think it speeded it up." The seven teachers, says Albany superintendent Lonnie Palmer, were sent to schools with a "less disadvantaged" student population. "We've seen a significant improvement in the disciplinary climate and parental involvement," says Palmer. "We anticipate and hope we will see improvements in test scores in the spring." Like Giffen's principal, Palmer says the voucher offer only speeded up reforms at Giffen: "Because of the media attention we were able to get greater support from the teacher's union and others to make the changes in a more rapid fashion."

But Palmer's actions speak louder than her words. Fighting it all the way, Palmer nonetheless proves the point of the pro-voucher argument. "The theory of the marketplace can even work in public education," says the Hudson Institute's Chester Finn about Giffen. "The school system responded by giving the school a makeover."

Hence the makings of the grand compromise, a limited voucher experiment with dual aims: offer safety valves to academically ambitious inner-city parents and students, while giving school districts a kick-in-the-pants motivation to seek out more Charlotte Parkers from within their ranks. The notion of a grand education compromise isn't new. Former Clinton advisor Bill Galston and education conservative Diane Ravitch have called for a national experiment to test vouchers in several cities. "A lot of low-income parents have reached the end of their patience with the education status quo," says Galston.

An education compromise may seem unlikely, but it's actually less revolutionary than other recent social developments. Only a few years ago conventional wisdom held that welfare reform was unworkable and a decrease in violent crime impossible. Moreover, the pieces of an education compromise are beginning to line up: While the NAACP is sticking with the unions' anti-voucher line, black leaders have to be nervous about the fast rising support for vouchers among black parents. In Denver, where Sister Mary Ellen continues to embarrass Denver school officials with her success record with African-American students, black parents have brought suit to force the city's school system to grant both the vouchers and the transportation needed to get their children to private school. The most recent Phi Delta Kappa poll shows support for vouchers among blacks jumped from 42 to 62 percent in a single year. "We do not normally get a 20-point swing in one year," said one Phi Delta Kappa pollster.

How long can black leaders stand in the way of what black parents want? No one can say, but former Rep. Floyd Flake of New York, who is pro-voucher, claims that "there is an urgency and desperation on the part of parents to not lose another generation of their children." Prominent black columnist William Raspberry, a longtime defender of public schools, announced his decision on May 30 with a column titled "A Reluctant Convert to School Choice." In fact, there's a heated private debate taking place over vouchers among black leaders. Listen to this hint from Urban League President Hugh Price: "If urban schools as we know them continue to fail in the face of all we know about how to improve them, then your customers will be obliged to shop elsewhere for a quality education."

Blacks aren't the only ones joining the grand compromise. Those Democrats who have flourished thanks to the support soccer moms have shown them on education issues have to be worried about recent signs that Republicans have figured out how to turn the education issue in their favor. James Gilmore won the Virginia State House with a campaign vowing to put more teachers in classrooms. And Sen. Al D'Amato's pollsters have selected one big issue to once again win reelection against the odds: vilify the teachers' unions.

Granted, the sight of Senator Pothole posing as the Education Senator is not pretty. But consider this: D'Amato's sure-footed pollsters have a solid history of bailing out their man, so they probably know something that should worry the unions. And it may not be that hard to see. How could anyone miss the recent spectacle of 23,000 families applying for 1,300 private-school scholarships in New York?

Does that mean the teachers' unions might see a limited experiment as a good political compromise? Not likely. The unions can be counted on to call in their last favor with the last state legislator to block even limited voucher experiments. American Federation of Teachers President Sandra Feldman calls the Republican interest in vouchers a "cruel hoax," and she's undoubtedly right that many conservatives are more interested in bashing unions than helping inner-city children. But that was no cruel hoax happening in Sister Mary Ellen Roach's school.

For the moment, forget about the power politics and imagine yourself having to answer this question. An urban mother who has played by all the rules — took her pregnancy seriously, read to her child, enforced discipline, nourished academic interest — comes to you and asks: How can my children learn in these chaotic classrooms? Go ahead, look her in the eye and try to explain this country doesn't owe her child an education.

This grand compromise is not about bashing either teachers or public schools. The sad reality is that there simply aren't enough Charlotte Parkers to go around. While some states, such as Texas, deserve a lot of credit for generating more educators like her, most school districts simply lack the motivation. They need a shot in the arm, and limited voucher programs could be just what the doctor ordered. That's where the compromise kicks in: If Giffen Elementary is any predictor of the future of targeted voucher programs, public schools could end up winners as well. Let's not limit these inner-city voucher programs to the whims of a handful of multimillionaires. Let the public experiments begin. ●

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Selected Readings on School Reform

Standards, Tests, and Accountability

The struggle to establish rigorous standards continues to challenge the education industry. Many schools have weakened their standards to meet community expectations concerning grades and college admissions. This leads to serious academic shortcomings for many students. How can a school set challenging standards for its students while ensuring that each individual can achieve them?

Reporter Kent Fischer dives into these issues in his account of social promotion—"Promoting Failure"—from *The St. Petersburg Times*. Fischer details the unfortunate consequences of separating academic progress from grade promotion in Florida's schools. Calling attention to increasingly widespread grade inflation and repetitive curriculum, Fischer explains that social promotion "erode(s) the quality of everyone's education." State lawmakers have begun to address the problem through statewide tests that require remediation and retention for students that fail to meet the standard for their grade.

Grade inflation also poses an obvious threat to academic standards, a threat that becomes even more pernicious when it is mixed with a form of affirmative action on behalf of low achievers. *The San Francisco Chronicle* exposes one school's effort to sever the grade distribution from individual student achievement. The principal of Balboa High School sent a memo to teachers setting numerical targets for A's, B's, and C's—the day before the quarter's grades were due.

Ellen Nakashima's *Washington Post* piece, "New School of Thought on Tests," documents how hard it is to hold schools to a uniform standard while allowing for the special challenges that some schools face. Schools that serve poor and transient students are at an obvious disadvantage when competing with wealthier, more stable counterparts on standardized tests. Nakashima notes that policymakers are finding it expedient to measure outcomes according to additional criteria such as socioeconomic status and prior achievement levels. We thought that the problem of disparate expectations was one that standards were supposed to eradicate.

Finally, Donna Harrington-Lueker's "States Raise the Bar," in *The American School Board Journal*, examines the challenge of integrating standards into actual classrooms. The author recounts the experiences of several districts in implementing standards-based curricula. The new standards reshaped the schools' entire culture, requiring different approaches to professional development, textbooks and curricula, and student evaluation.

MAS

St. Petersburg Times, May 17, 1998

Promoting Failure

by Kent Fisher

He's a second-grader, who towers over his classmates. But he's a year being in reading, and his frustrated teachers at Centennial Elementary Schools in Dade City are wondering what to do next. His teacher flips through a green folder: Tutoring, special education testing, a personal reading program.

None of it worked.

What next? Should they hold John back -- make him repeat second grade? Or should he get a "social promotion," which would send the boy to third grade despite his slow progress.

John's teacher pushes for social promotion. He is taller and more mature than his classmates and may feel out of place with second-graders next year, she argues. Repeating the grade probably won't help. Besides, his teacher continues, John does good work on the few occasions when he applies himself.

The 11 others shoehorned around the conference table nod. They know keeping him back probably won't help catch him up. If anything, a retention will dramatically increase the chances that he will eventually become a drop out.

"Through my daily observations and his work habits, I feel he's critically low in reading and writing," the teacher says of John, whose real name is withheld as part of the agreement that allowed a Times reporter to witness the meeting.

"What about retention?" asks assistant principal Eva Hunsberger.

"I don't think so," the teacher says, shaking her head. "I just don't see him as a good candidate for so many reasons. He's really big."

"Maturity. Size," says another teacher.

"And he's very street-smart," John's teacher continues. "I would be worried about motivational issues. ...I don't know that we accomplish anything" with a retention.

That brings more nods from the group.

"Okay, gotcha," Hunsberger says. "We'll promote him and invite him to summer school."

John, who barely has the skills of a second-grader, will be a third-grader next year. This month in Florida schools, principals will push ahead another 45,000 students like John.

Over time, critics say, those well-intentioned promotions cheapen the education of ll children. They erode classroom standards, inflate grades, and teach kids that hard work doesn't count.

Lowering the Bar

Educators socially promote children to keep them interested in learning despite their academic setbacks. Less than 3 percent of all students advance in this way each year. But that percentage reflect only those social promotions where a principal makes the decision, passes the child reports that action to the state. Since 1993, Florida principals have handed out 175,000 documented social promotions.

But that's not nearly the half of it.

Interviews with educational researchers and scores of teachers reveal that thousands more social promotions occur, quietly, in the classroom and don't show up in state statistics. They're the results of pressure from administrators to keep failure rates down, dumbed down assignments, questionable extra--credit work, and withering academic standards.

How pervasive is the problem? Almost 60 percent of Pasco teachers responding to a Times survey said official social promotions force them to lower their standards and to teach weaker lessons to all students.

"In my class, if the students make even half an effort, they'll get an A or a B," said Gail Reynolds, a veteran English teacher at Zephryhills High School. "These kids would have had to work very hard for a C 20 years ago. We're accepting less and less."

Dozens of teachers told the Times that at least one in every four Florida school children is not academically qualified for the grade they're in. Yet each year, school promote about 95 percent of their students to the next grade.

"One of the biggest problems we've created for ourselves is the expanded use of social promotions," said Education Commissioner Frank Brogan. "The bottom line is we have to stop pushing kids ahead when they are not ready. When you socially promote large numbers of students, you pull down what you expect of all students."

The numbers prove his point:

- 25 percent of eleventh- and twelfth- graders failed last year's state graduation test -- which is set at about the ninth-grad level
- 40 percent of Florida college freshman weren't ready for college last year and had to take remedial courses instead. Cost: $15-million a year.
- 40 percent of Pinellas County school children can't read at their grade level, according to a recent report.
- 42 percent of Hillsborough County forth graders scored so low on a statewide writing test last year that hey would not have met a key requirement of the district's new promotion standards.

Now, top officials of the Florida Department of Education have declared war on what Brogan calls "the wholesale use of social promotions."

A scene last month at Bayonet Point Middle School in Pasco County illustrates their concerns: Many students in Jim Wilcox's eighth-grade earth-science class strain over a simple project. Working in pairs, the students construct time lines of the history of the universe. The assignment was little more than an exercise in converting decimals, something all the students had previously studied -- and supposedly mastered.

“To go from millimeters to centimeters, how many decimal places do we go?” Wilcox asks the class.

“Three,” shouts one student.

“One,” shouts the rest of the class.

“Right. Which way do we move it?” Wilcox asks the class.

“To the right,” answer about six students.

“No, to the left, the rest of the class says loudly.

A girl in the front row raises her hand.

“We did time lines in sixth-grade and we did measurement last year,” she says. “Why do we have to do it again?”

Despite explicit directions and the decimal rehash, about a third of the students appear to be lost or completely uninterested. Fifteen minutes before the class ends, two girls sit on the floor in the back of the room. The only mark on their time line is the black line they drew down the middle of it. They have not converted a single measurement.

“Mr. Wilcox, we need help,” says one, chewing on a green fingernail. “Where do we start?”

Pressure to Pass

Critics trace the rise of social promotions in Florida schools to the '80s, when headlines screamed about Florida's embarrassing high dropout rate.

Knowing that retention contributes to the dropout rate, principals focused on ways to help students bring up their grades. Some teachers say that translated into pressure to pass kids, no matter what.

Teachers who flunk more than 10 per cent of their students are sometimes seen as poor teachers and may get bad job evaluations.

John Barry discovered early one school year that the kids in his class at Tarpon Springs Middle School were not accustomed to hard work.

The best way to handle it, he thought, was to tell the students exactly what he expected of them, and let the grades fall where they may. More than half his students got D's and F's during the first half of the year.

"I got called on the carpet for that," Barry said, recalling his 1995 job evaluation. "They got the grades they deserved. But I was told, flat out, the grades had to come up."

Barry's evaluation wasn't good that year. He was cited for using sarcasm with students and for missing faculty meetings. But much of the evaluation details the F's and D's he handed out. He's a substitute teacher now, and doesn't think he will ever be hired again full-time.

The irony of the thing, he said, is that by the end of the year, not many kids in his Social Studies class flunked.

"I was making them work, holding them to a standard," Barry said. "They responded to it. Once they know you're serious, they can do the work."

Math teacher Dean Johnson had a similar experience. He has consistently had good evaluations at Dunedin High School. But in 1993 and 1994, he was criticized for failing too many students (40 per cent got F's one semester). On both evaluations, an administrator detailed the percentage of D's and F's he gave to students, and in 1994 wrote: "Rates too high."

Many teachers find it difficult to stand up to administrators. So, they do just about anything to ensure that their students pass. They accept assignments months after they're due. They contrive easy extra credit projects so students can gain enough points to reach a passing grade. They give "open book" tests, where students use their notebooks to look up answers.

Hudson Middle School teacher Cliff Taylor gives bonus points when students return a report card with a parent's signature on it. He'll do the same thing if a parent signs an assignment that their child flunked.

"Technically they're earning points for not learning anything, but I'm at least making the parent aware of the problem," Taylor said.

And then there is the ever-present "participation points," which students earn for being attentive in class. It lets kids, as one teacher put it, "earn points for breathing." In Pasco County, those points account for one-quarter of a student's grade.

As part of a reading-comprehension test, English teacher Carol Dull required her students to write a summary of a recent reading assignment. Ten of her students didn't do it and received a grade of zero. Later, Dull realized the zeros would make it extremely hard for the students to pass the class.

So she decided to use the exercise as a bonus assignment, not a graded exam. Students who scored better than 80 on the assignment received 10 bonus points. The others -- including the 10 who didn't do it at all -- got nothing extra. But they didn't get zeros either.

"These are the kinds of things I'll do to compensate because so any (students) have never been asked to work hard," said Dull, who teaches at River Ridge High School in Pasco County. "What am I supposed to do with a kid who can't write a complete sentence?"

Kids say social promotion does teach the one thing: why work hard when you don't have to?

Shannon Hinrichs said that, in middle school, she loved to cause trouble. She skipped school and slid by doing as little work as possible. When she got to high school, she was reading on a third-grade level.

"It's a lot harder because you don't know how to read, you don't know how to spell," she said of high school. "I want a high school diploma, but it's really hard because I'm so far behind."

A sophomore now, Shannon is in a dropout prevention class at

Ridgewood High in Pasco County. In less than two years, she has improved her reading sills by three grade levels and has her eye on graduation. her teachers think she can do it. Shannon knows it won't be easy.

"It's my own doing," she says of the hard work ahead. "If I wanted to make A's (in middle school) I could have."

Why didn't she?

"Because I knew they would pass me. They always did."

A Tough Call

Florida lawmakers are pressing to halt such automatic promotions.

Two years ago, the state Cabinet adopted the "Sunshine State Standards," certain key skills all children are to master by the end of elementary, middle and high school. To see how well those standards are being met, the state spent $25-million to create a new series of tests, called Florida Comprehensive Assessment Test, or FCAT. The new tests cost $7-million a year to administer.

The results of the first round of tests came our Monday. Brogan labeled "somewhat sobering" the statewide average score of around 300 out of a possible 500.

In future years, a lot will ride on FCAT scores: whether fifth- and eighth-graders go on to middle and high school, and whether high school students will get their diplomas.

Meanwhile, districts have until July 1 to comply with a new law, quietly passed by last year's Legislature. It orders schools to create academic standards for each grade. Students who fail to meet them in grades 2, 3 and 4 will be held back if they are still behind after a year of remedial help.

"Social promotions will have a very small place -- if at all -- in this system," said David Ashburn, a state deputy education commissioner in charge of instruction and assessment. "We want all students to be able to read, write and compute before they get promoted, not after."

Florida isn't the only state cracking down on social promotion. Districts in Chicago, New York, Seattle, Boston and Texas are clamping down on social promotion.

It's an admirable goal, proponents of social promotion say. But it's also unrealistic and terribly short-sighted.

Many factors outside the classroom influence a child's success in school. In fact, the single most decisive predictor of academic success is the attitude of a child's parents. Poverty, health problems and learning disabilities also figure into the equation.

Furthermore, few educators think retaining students does them any good.

Hard and fast retention policies had their day in the 70's and were failures, according to Oscar Robinson, the director of elementary education in Pinellas County.

Under the old system "we had a lot of kids going to middle school already to drop out," he said. "Personally, I think we make too big a deal out of promotion, retention and social promotion. The key is instructional support and better trained teachers."

Knowing all this, educators have long wrangled with the promotion/retention dilemma.

Most school districts strictly limit the number of times students can be held back. Students in Pasco and Pinellas counties, for example, can be held back only once in elementary school and once in middle school, no matter how bad their grades. In most districts, principals must weigh a student's social and emotional health, as well as their physical size, maturity and attitude toward school.

Until recently, Pasco County's promotion policy stated: "Poor (grades) and/or performance on achievement tests need not result in retention."

Even in Hillsborough, which last year adopted tough new promotion policies, principals can consider holding a child back only when the student's "physical, social and emotional development support a retention decision."

The new policy, however, is coupled with clear academic standards each child must meet in order to earn a promotion.

"The lines are very clear now," said Marilyn Blackmer, an elementary curriculum specialist in Hillsborough. "Principals know exactly what the criteria are..."

Principals say they have to consider social and emotional factors because after a retention, students are older and often more mature than their classmates. They can feel out of place and sometimes look out of place. The awkwardness can lead to discipline problems, which put the children further behind. Retained students often see themselves as failures, which does nothing to help them catch up academically.

What does help them catch up is remediation—lots of it. And that, teachers say, is the key. They can live with social promotion if the kids get intense extra help. Of course, that's expensive and all too often, the help doesn't come. Or when it does, the help doesn't work. Remediation then falls to the classroom teachers.

That's when social promotion begins to erode the quality of everyone's education.

"We do a lot of remediation, and you'll find we aren't teaching as much of the curriculum because of it," said Mike Phillips, a seventh-grade math teacher at Hudson Middle School in Pasco County.

The Snowball Effect

In the weeks before Christmas vacation, a fifth-grade student in Wendy Carswell's class had finally started learning how to multiply and divide. Carswell planned to start teaching fractions after the holidays, but Carswell knew the girl needed to hone more basic skills before tackling new material.

So while the rest of her class at Centennial Elementary in Dade City tackled fractions, the girl went to another teacher for extra help in multiplication and division. It meant she would probably miss fractions altogether, and go to middle school knowing little about them.

"I would rather send her to sixth grade having mastered multiplication and division and not been exposed to fractions, than send her on having mastered neither," Carswell said. "Why hold a child back for an entire year if they have a deficit in just one area?"

That seems fair, if the focus is on that one child. But critics say it may not be fair to that child's new classmates.

When students progress without basic skills, teachers down the line must help them catch up. That takes time away from the majority of students, who aren't behind.

Eighth-grade math teacher Bill Kollenbaum, for example, exhausts half the school year re-teaching elementary math: rounding whole numbers, computing fractions, solving simple word problems.

Then he squeezes the entire eighth-grade curriculum, which sets the foundation for algebra, into the last half of the school year.

"I'm teaching sixth-grade material in the eighth grade," said Kollenbaum, a 30-year classroom veteran who teaches at Hudson Middle in Pasco. "These kids can't compute."

Yet the kids will continue to pass through school, no matter how badly they perform. That's especially true if the student had already been retained.

Ten days ago, some educators at Bay Point Middle in Pinellas County sat down to decide what to do with one such child.

He is a 14-year-old sixth-grader, two to three years older than his classmates. Retained twice already, he is pretty much guaranteed promotions throughout the rest of middle school, even though he's absent 75 percent of the time.

"He's bigger than everyone else, and older," said principal Dennis Griffin. "Now, he doesn't come to school because he doesn't want to be in class with little kids."

Griffin, a guidance counselor and an assistant principal sort through the boy's file, thinking aloud as they go. The file shows a steady string of F's. His classmates tease him, and he often responds with threats.

"No way, obviously, we can retain this kid," Griffin says. "There's no point in sending him to summer school."

"He won't go," replies counselor Linda Rounsaville.

For a minute they even contemplate putting him in eighth grade with kids closer to his own age, but decide against it. Griffin fills out a form letter to the boy's parents, informing them of his decision to promote their son to seventh grade despite his atrocious grades.

"I don't want to mislead anyone into thinking he's ready for seventh grade," Griffin said after the meeting.

The Anguish of Failure

Sometimes schools want to hold children back, only to have the decision vetoed by the parents. They see retention as the greater evil, an academic Scarlet Letter that brands their children, and themselves, as failures.

Heather Belasic's teacher at Woodland Elementary in Zephyrhills recommended she repeat first grade. Her mother, Denise, refused, and the school promoted Heather. A year later, Heather's second-grade teacher also recommended a retention. Denise was again resolute: Move her on.

My husband was adamant about keeping her back, but I wasn't," Denise Belasic said. "When you hold your child back people look at you like your child isn't as smart as theirs.

Three years later, Heather still struggles in school. Her reading skills are adequate, but she has difficulty comprehending what she reads. As a result, she's behind in almost every subject.

Her mother can't help but feel partly to blame.

Did she read to her daughter enough? Should she have sent Heather to pre-school? If she volunteered more in school, would she have noticed her daughter's academic troubles?

"She was behind from the first day of first grade," Denise Belasic said. "Why didn't I notice it? I felt that I should have been more involved. I felt like I didn't do my job. If we had held her back, maybe she wouldn't have so much trouble."

Heather's test scores aren't low enough to qualify her for special education or other intensive remedial help. The Belasics pay a teacher $25 to tutor Heather once a week after school. But Heather still struggles.

"When I see that my child needs extra help and the school isn't offering it, I don't understand that," Denise Belasic said.

Vivian Bowman is in a similar situation. Her youngest son, Ronald Squire, is in sixth-grade and also is struggling to read.

Throughout school, Ronald's report cards gave few hints of serious academic trouble. Although he twice attended a summer school, his teachers at Gulfport Elementary in Pinellas County gave the boy mostly B's. A school counselor wrote that Ronald was "attentive, motivated and puts forth good effort."

But even in fifth grade, Ronald struggled to read even the simplest books. Bowman requested a tutor and special education testing, but Ronald's fifth-grade teacher said there was no cause for alarm.

Last summer, Bowman enrolled Ronald at Central Christian, a St. Petersburg private school. He lasted less than two weeks.

"They told me he was four years behind," Bowman said. "He's headed for a criminal life. Nobody's going to hire him if he can't read."

Ronald is embarrassed by his troubles in school, and he fears his classmates will tease him if they find out he has a hard time reading.

"I'm doing a lot better than I used to because my mom makes me read every night," he says sheepishly.

Bowman fears her son will never catch up to other kids his age.

"They were just giving him the grades," she says angrily. "They were just passing him along."

San Francisco Chronicle, April 4, 1998

Teachers Told to Pump Up Grades

Quota of 5% more A's, B's, C's asked at S.F. high school

by Nanette Asimov

Administrators at a San Francisco high school are giving teachers until June to ``increase the number of A's, B's and C's by 5 percent" over last year's grades, according to a memo obtained by The Chronicle.

The four-paragraph note immediately prompted charges among educators that the school is inflating grades and concerns that the policy is a symptom of a disturbing national trend: rising grades, but sinking student performance.

The document, dated March 23, carefully explains that teachers at Balboa High School do not need to increase each of the three grades by 5 percent, but ``the combined total of all the A's, B's and C's by 5 percent."

Principal Elaine Koury denied that she and assistant Principal Gloria Galindo, whose name appears on the memo, want teachers to inflate student grades. ``This is an opportunity for people to enter into discussion about how they can change their strategies to help more students succeed," Koury said. ``The reason we talked about A's B's and C's is that those are the letter grades acceptable to college. Even though D is a passing grade, a college is not going to accept that."

At Balboa, angry teachers called the memo ``insulting." Speaking anonymously, many said they will ignore it.

``I will not give students grades they don't deserve," said one teacher. ``It implies that teachers at Balboa should lower their standards. I think the principal is under a lot of pressure to make our school look good."

Henrietta Schwartz, dean of the schools of education for the California State University system, called it ``an infringement of academic freedom." ``What right does the administration have to influence the way in which teachers give grades? I hope teachers will resist this." Principal Koury's concern about college eligibility -- and her solution -- are not unique. But they may create unrealistic expectations for college freshmen.

For example, 31.5 percent of freshmen at UCLA reported having an ``A" average in high school in 1996, compared with 28.1 percent in 1995 and 12.5 percent in 1969, writes Stanford education professor Mike Kirst.

But even as grades are up, academic performance is down.

Just last week, state figures showed that more than half of all first-time freshmen in the California State University system, 54 percent, failed to pass an entry-level math placement test. Nearly half, 47 percent, failed the English placement test.

``If grades are inflated and don't measure the true achievement of the students, then they become eligible for universities but cannot succeed academically when they get there," said Kirst, who is also co-director of Policy Analysis for California Education. The College Board, which administers the SAT, has been ``alarmed," Kirst said, that the grade-point average is going up much faster than SAT scores are. ``Either the SATs are not a good measure of performance, or there's a lot of grade inflation out there," he said.

Pressure to produce attractive ``academic indicators" is especially intense in San Francisco. Schools are expected to improve each year according to a variety of measures that include test scores, dropout rates—and eligibility to attend UC Berkeley.

Those numbers are touted in an annual news conference and posted on the district's web site. Between 1990 and 1995, for example, the number of freshmen from San Francisco who registered at UC Berkeley rose by 67 percent. And from schools other than prestigious Lowell, the number rose by 139 percent.

``No one is requiring increased grades," said Bob Harrington, the assistant superintendent who monitors the numbers. He said he had not seen the Balboa memo and abruptly cut off a reporter who tried to read it to him.

Principal Koury said the effort to increase college-eligible grades is part of a school-wide effort to help urban teens stay in school.

``We've really been reaching out," she said. ``Whenever we saw a kid that looked like the kid wasn't going to make it, we'd grab the kid's coattail and say, `You can do this.' "

But some teachers said Koury's efforts may now have gone too far. The memo appeared, they said, one day before third-quarter grades were due.

One teacher marveled at the memo's edict to meet a 5-percent higher quota of grades, while maintaining high standards. ``My standards are already incredible," said the teacher. ``I've seen a drop in grades this year. But when they leave my class, they're going to be incredible students."

Washington Post, May 26, 1998

New School of Thought on Tests

Some Educators Want Socioeconomic Issues Considered, Too

By Ellen Nakashima
Washington Post Staff Writer

Langley Park-McCormick Elementary Principal Patricia Kelly shudders whenever test scores are released by the State of Maryland.

"I take them home and look at them privately first," says the Prince George's County educator, "to make sure I can get my act together."

The school, which has one of the highest concentrations of poor children in one of the wealthiest regions of the country, has consistently ranked near the bottom in its performance on state tests.

"It's hard to see our scores compared with other schools', because it looks like we're not doing a very good job," said Kelly, whose Hyattsville school has 640 students—more than half of whom will come or go at some point during the year and only 17 percent of whose parents have a high school education. "It's disheartening, because we know how hard we work."

But test scores alone do not tell the story, officials say. What if, in evaluating a school, you took into account how many poor children it has? What if you looked at how test scores have improved overall, not just what the scores are?

That's what some school officials in the Washington region and across the nation are doing out of concern for fairness as they respond to public pressure for proof that schools are performing better.

Using what some educators call a "value-added" approach to gauging performance, school officials in Montgomery and Prince George's counties have become the first locally to give credit to schools that raise the achievement of harder-to-reach, poor children. In fact, when evaluated on those terms, some schools in poor communities outshine some schools in far tonier neighborhoods.

"If you simply look at absolute scores of students or dropout rates, you're not taking into account the different challenges that schools confront," said Willis D. Hawley, dean of the College of Education at the University of Maryland. "The social background of students plays a big role in their level of achievement."

But many of the same educators who support the approach fear it is too complex to be understood by the public. And some parents and educators are concerned that analyzing test scores through the prism of poverty or race can send a dangerous message: that we should expect less of some children because they are poor or members of a minority group.

"It's a cop-out," said Malik Chaka, head of the African American Parents Community Education Consortium, a Montgomery County advocacy group. "It provides a ready-made excuse for Montgomery County public schools' failure to adequately educate some children. To me, it almost reeks of the 'Bell Curve' kind of thinking, that kids can't achieve because they are poor or because they're black or because they are Hispanics."

As the push to raise academic standards intensifies nationwide, so, too, has the debate over how to deal with the socioeconomically disadvantaged—arguably the most volatile issue in education today.

The education journal Education Week featured the debate over the "value-added" approach to measuring performance in a recent article on new academic research. And in Virginia, where schools by 2004 must have at least 70 percent of their students passing new tests or risk losing accreditation, critics say the state should make special allowances for schools with a high percentage of poor students and for schools that post low but improved scores.

But Virginia education officials say higher standards are meaningless if schools are not measured by the same tape.

"Public education is supposed to be the great equalizer," state Board of Education member Lil Tuttle said. "When we let compassion for a present situation override what we know is in the child's best long-term interest, we do him or her a tremendous disservice."

Nonetheless, in Montgomery and Prince George's, the new method has boosted teacher morale. Advocates say they hope it will improve teacher effectiveness and student performance. In Alexandria, the School Board discussed the issue last week, and Fairfax officials are studying it as part of a larger push to address school accountability.

In Prince George's, researchers have developed a method to weigh poverty in assessing schools' improvement over the years in the Maryland School Performance Assessment Program. The adjusted scores do not change the official scores. And the new snapshots of school progress, because they are statistically difficult to explain, are used mainly by staff, although the public has access to them.

"It's disheartening, because we know how hard we work."

— Principal Patricia Kelly,
Langley Park-McCormick Elementary School,
on perceptions of low test scores

In Montgomery, officials divide schools into five categories according to wealth, then compare county test scores among schools within those categories. Comparisons can be made across the wealth divide—focusing on how far above or below the expected norm a school is for its category. All schools are ultimately held to the same standard.

"Continuous improvement toward a higher standard is as important as hitting that standard," Montgomery Associate Superintendent Steven G. Seleznow said. "When schools are making successive leaps toward that goal, then those people need to know that they're doing the right thing and need to be recognized for it."

Sunny Sipes, a statistical specialist with the Prince George's County schools, put it this way: "If you're in a school that's already performing well, it's really no indication of how well you've run that school to look at just test scores." For the past four years, Sipes and research director Eugene Adcock have experimented with models to give schools a fair shake in the ratings game. Although they have found that class size, student ethnicity and degree of teacher training affect test scores, the most significant factor is poverty, Adcock said.

To level the playing field, Adcock performs a series of complex statistical operations that weed out wealth as a differential among schools. "Remove the excuses. Remove the advantages. Now how well did we do?" Adcock said.

A similar, though simpler, exercise takes place in Montgomery. There, statisticians plot a school's poverty rate and its average score on the county's achievement tests, called Criterion Referenced Tests.

Broad Acres Elementary in Silver Spring has more poor children than any other county elementary school. Yet, applying the value-added index, Broad Acres in 1994 scored higher than would be expected for its category in third-grade math than did Bannockburn Elementary School in Bethesda, which has a poverty rate less than 5 percent and scored much lower than schools with similar affluence.

"In many, many ways, this is a very good way to reflect data, because people are seeing the total picture," said Mary D'Ovidio, Broad Acres principal. "If they don't see the total picture, then they look at the scores and say, 'I don't want my child going to that school.' "

As in Prince Georges, the Montgomery information is used primarily to help staff members learn what's working in schools that are performing well and to identify those that need to work harder—even if their scores are already fairly high.

"Yes, you feel bad," said Jane Butler, Bannockburn Elementary principal, of her school's low 1994 math scores. "But you don't let it stop you from growing."

In fact, after the scores were released, Butler and her staff redoubled efforts to improve teacher instruction and identify students who needed extra help. Last year, the school's third-grade math scores reached the average for the wealthy school group.

William L. Sanders, director of the University of Tennessee value-added research center, has designed one of the first and most widely known models to measure school performance by tracking individual students over the years. He calls suburban schools "whose kids are coming to school with all the advantages" and that don't make efforts to improve their scores "sliders and gliders."

"I have caught more political hell in Tennessee from the schools like that than from the inner-city schools," said Sanders, who has been hired by Montgomery to help with its value-added project. "I've leveled the playing field, and a lot of the schools don't like leveling the playing field."

American School Board Journal, June 1998

States Raise the Bar

Now local school districts are accountable for results

BY DONNA HARRINGTON-LUEKER

When Rhode Island embarked on an ambitious standards-based effort to raise the bar for student performance two years ago, state officials knew the hurdles would be high. Just how high became clear last fall when the state released the results of its new mathematics assessment.

In the past, Rhode Island schools had gauged students' progress against standardized tests that invariably ranked the children at the 50th or 52nd percentile. But instead of measuring student achievement against a national norm, the new test showed how well students did on new state performance goals. The results were sobering. Forty-four percent of the state's eighth-graders failed to meet the new standards on basic mathematical skills such as addition and subtraction, and only 19 percent reached the state's goal on problem-solving.

"We really weren't at all surprised," Peter McWalters, Rhode Island's commissioner of education, says of the results. "The new test just confirmed our fear that we were being falsely complacent about our test scores."

As state legislatures and state departments of education continue their push to adopt new academic standards, Rhode Island's experience is becoming commonplace.

Currently, most states are either working on or have adopted statewide standards, and this year, according to the Denver-based National Conference of State Legislatures, a significant number of those states have plans to link their standards to rigorous new assessments and accountability measures. This year, for example, Colorado—one of the leaders in standards-based reform—is considering a bill that would tie a school's accreditation to its use of new assessments that have been aligned with the state's standards. Rhode Island last year passed legislation that allows the state's commissioner of education to intervene in districts that aren't making progress toward state goals.

Report cards showing how well local districts are doing, takeover provisions for low-performing schools, and requirements that students pass state tests in order to graduate are other high-stakes options under consideration or already adopted.

"We're hearing states say, 'We've done standards, and now we're moving on to other issues," says Julie Bell, NCSL's education program director. "Accountability is key."

Now comes the hard part

As state legislatures move beyond standards to rewards and sanctions, though, many local districts are still struggling to align their curricula with new state standards, prepare teachers to work with standards, develop programs for students who fall behind, and make other changes in the way they deliver instruction.

"The easiest part of the work—setting the standards—is now done in many

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Donna Harrington-Lueker, a former managing editor of The American School Board Journal, *is a freelance writer in Newport, R.I.*

places," says Robert Schwartz, director of Achieve, a Cambridge, Mass., based nonprofit group committed to standards-based reform. The hardest task—getting from the adoption of good standards to actual changes in classroom practice—lies ahead, Schwartz and others say.

"It's not a question of raising the bar and just shouting, 'Higher,'" says Schwartz.

Kati Haycock, director of the Education Trust in Washington, D.C., cites a similar concern. "The language of standards is just further along than the practice of standards-based reform," says Haycock, whose group works with a national network of high-poverty urban and rural schools. "Right now, people are inventing as they go along."

Further, while some schools have worked doggedly over the last five years to incorporate standards into their curricula, others have only begun the effort. And some districts admit they are just going through the motions of adopting state standards and then leaving them to gather dust on the shelf. "They just don't think it'll matter," says one advocate. That's a risky strategy, though, given the push for rewards and sanctions in state legislatures. "No one takes it seriously until the first round of test scores," says one policy specialist.

But complying with state directives isn't the only reason to embrace standards-based reform. With its emphasis on rigorous content for all students, advocates say, this reform has the potential to boost the achievement levels of youngsters who live in poverty.

"Standards-based reform is not a panacea," says Haycock. "But we know from our work in the classrooms that we ask too little of all American kids." That lack of rigor is "10 times worse" in high-poverty schools, Haycock says. And without clear guidance about which work is good enough, schools inevitably settle for low expectations for poor children.

"Without a clear sense of what you want students to do, you run the risk of heading off in stupid directions," Haycock says.

Two urban districts

Two city school districts in the early stages of standards-based reform offer a glimpse of what's involved in putting standards in place.

The Los Angeles Unified School District, the nation's second-largest school system, began its push for standards-based reform in 1995-96 when it began to develop standards in core subjects using various state and national standards as its guide, says Joan Evans, the district's director of assessment of student achievement programs. (See sidebar.) In addition, Evans says, the district involved more than 60,000 parents, students, teachers, union representatives, and community members in the standards-setting process. That kind of involvement "gave us ownership from everybody," Evans says.

But getting the standards into the classroom has proved a challenge. As a first step, Evans says, the district translated information about standards-based reform into five languages (Armenian, English, Cantonese, Spanish, and Korean) and sent it home to parents. It also trained more than 3,600 teachers, parents, and principals in the essentials of standards-based curriculum and assessment—enough to form a group of between four and 16 people in each school in the district.

Recognizing that teachers and schools would need additional instructional resources to teach to the new standards, the district has also encouraged efforts to develop sample lesson plans linked to the new standards, and it has put the lessons on its Internet web site (the lessons can be found at *www.lausd.k12.ca.us/lausd/offices/instruct/resources/forms/index.html*). Further, it has encouraged schools to pool their Title I money and use their federal bilingual funds to support standards.

Given that high academic standards imply a high level of consistency—what's deemed excellent at one school must also be deemed excellent at another—Evans says the district also has encouraged teachers to study actual student work and develop scoring guides, which the district field-tested this past year.

Schools, in turn, are beginning to take a close look at how to align their curriculum with the new standards. At Foshay Learning Center, a year-round school in south-central Los Angeles, teachers are working in departments and teams to identify which standards might already be reflected in their lessons, says Howard Lappin, principal of the 3,300-student school. Ninety-five percent of Foshay's students live in poverty, and the school has a transiency rate of nearly 60 percent.

To help teachers focus on standards and develop new course materials, the school has also assigned a full-time teacher to serve as a coach to help other teachers with lesson plans and curriculum. That kind of commitment to providing new instructional resources is a necessity when a school adopts new standards, Lappin says: "With standards-based reform, you can't just rest on the textbook."

In the second year of a five-year reform plan based on new standards and assessments, the Boston Public Schools are taking similar steps. The school system already has established citywide learning standards based on Massachusetts's new curriculum frameworks and developed with an eye to what the state's highest-performing districts expect of their students. (The city's standards can be found at *www.boston.k12.ma.us/*.) Boston's language arts and mathematics standards are already being used in the district; next year, science standards will be available as well.

The district is also adopting stiff graduation requirements: Beginning in 2003, Boston students will have to pass new state assessments in English, mathematics, science, and social science plus a standardized test in reading and mathematics. They'll also have to complete a position paper in history and social studies, a science fair project, and an in-depth literature study and make an oral presentation in a foreign language.

Getting students and schools to that level will be difficult, though. "The big issues are money, time, and professional development," says Sidney Smith, director of curriculum and instructional practices.

Kathleen Flannery, principal of Everett Elementary School, sees both sides of the coin. "Standards clarify what we're doing in a thousand different ways," says Flannery. "Everyone has to understand what good kindergarten, first-, and second-grade work looks like." But, she says, standards need to be "perfectly aligned" with textbooks and assessments. Two years into the reform, she and others agree, that kind of alignment hasn't taken place.

A commitment to standards also requires principals to return to their roles as instructional leaders and work closely with teachers on curriculum and instruction—a change for many urban principals who "have been traditionally mired down in operational and management issues," says Flannery.

And standards-based reform takes money. A local education foundation has agreed to provide $5 million to support standards and literacy in the district. As a result, 27 Boston schools will receive nearly $300,000 each over four years to fund their work on standards.

Standards and rural districts

The issues aren't that different in rural school districts like the Whiteriver Unified School District. A remote school district located entirely on the Fort Apache Indian reservation in northeast Arizona, Whiteriver is working to align its curriculum with Arizona's statewide standards. The district, which enrolls 2,800 students, is also part of a nationwide network, sponsored by the Education Trust, that links high-poverty rural school systems committed to using standards to raise achievement in mathematics and science.

As in Boston and Los Angeles, schools in Whiteriver are still in the planning stages of reform. Each of the district's five schools has adopted a plan to use standards, says Michelle Blaine, director of curriculum and professional development in Whiteriver, and teachers are working districtwide to define the kind of work students should be doing and the quality of that work. "Everyone has to have common standards to work from," says Blaine.

But raising the level of awareness of the standards—and how they can drive reform—is slow work. "Time's our biggest hurdle—time to talk to one another, time to build a consensus about what the standards mean," says Blaine. Instructional resources are an issue as well. Textbooks typically don't reflect the new standards, she says, so developing new teaching units and new instructional materials is crucial. "I eventually envision a district file cabinet full of units on a particular standard that teachers can copy and use in their own classrooms," Blaine says.

Agreeing on what children at each grade level need to be able to do is important as well, Blaine points out: "We have to have a consensus: This is what we'll focus on in kindergarten. This is what we'll focus on in fourth grade. . . . We have to be able to say, 'These are the skills a kindergartner should know so that in 12th grade he'll be OK.'"

Lessons and hurdles

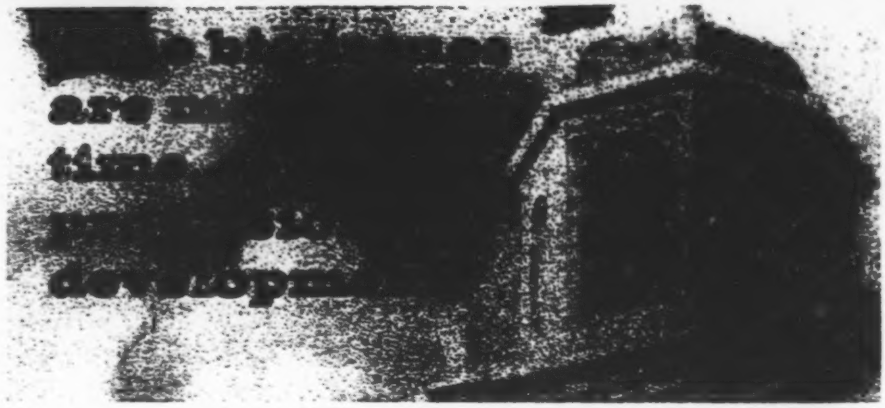
Those who have worked with standards-based reform elsewhere offer their own prescriptions for success, including learning to analyze data on student achievement, investing in professional development, and simply staying focused.

"You have to realize—at the school level, this is bedlam," says Marilyn Willis Crawford, a former middle school principal in Kentucky and coauthor of *Learning in Overdrive*, a book about standards-based reform. Schools that begin to work with standards-based reform often have other reforms in place as well, and the reforms don't always mesh, she says. As with any reform, too, schools involved in standards must continue with the daily business of schooling. "There's everything going on that you've always had going on: ball games, registering new kids, puddles in the parking lot, switching on the air conditioner," says Crawford.

Often, the pressure to maintain the existing system is strong. "All the pieces that we accept as 'school' involve a sorting mechanism in which some kids get an A and some get a D," says Crawford. "And when you start talking about standards, you upset that sorting mechanism." The problem? "To have a valedictorian, you have to have someone sort low."

Many districts struggle with testing issues as well. Many of the new assessments are costly to administer, and schools often add these assessments to traditional tests. Such so-called test creep can be costly. "These are new bills you have to pay," says John Vidal, assistant superintendent for support services in the Jefferson County, Colo., public schools. Vidal estimates it will cost his school district nearly $1 million to administer the new fourth-grade assessment at its 94 elementary schools.

To use standards to drive student achievement also requires an ability to measure a school's progress with hard data—something schools have not traditionally done well. Specifically, districts engaged in standards-based reform must routinely analyze data on student achievement—the number of students completing algebra and geometry, the number enrolled in Advanced Placement



classes, the number receiving D's and F's, and so on. At the building level, schools also need to break that data down according to race, gender, and even classroom teacher. "You have to know who's moving kids," says Crawford.

The results can be appreciable. One Los Angeles middle school, Evans says, used achievement data to identify students most at risk—those who received D's or F's in one or more classes. Those students then attended before- or after-school tutorial programs four days a week, and their parents signed compacts, agreeing to attend one Saturday session a month. Fifteen weeks after the school began the program, only seven students out of 277 remained on the list.

Another district that tracks achievement is Portland, Ore. To measure the progress students are making and identify students whose gains are too slow, the district analyzes individual student performance in grades 3, 5, 8, and 10. "They ask themselves, 'Will this student get where he needs to be by grade 10, or is the slope too gradual?'" says Marguerite Roza, who works with schools in the Pew Network for Standards-Based Reform, of which Portland is a part.

Susan Pimentel, a consultant on standards, agrees. "You want to use the data to look at which kids still aren't performing," says Pimentel, who's been involved in standards-based reform in Beaufort, S.C., and Charlotte-Mecklenburg, N.C., both leaders in the standards movement.

Changing practice

Perhaps the largest issue facing schools working with standards is the need to make a substantial commitment to teacher training. Schwartz and others familiar with the standards movement say many teachers don't have the in-depth knowledge of the subject matter they need to teach to high standards, especially in mathematics and science. "The ability to deliver an ambitious curriculum, an ambitious set of standards, may not be there," he says.

Haycock agrees. "Most teachers have neither the inclination nor the background to deliver high-quality curriculum to all students," she says. And in urban districts, where large numbers of teachers often end up teaching classes outside their field, the problem is most acute. "We're just way ahead of where teachers are," says Haycock.

One district that has made professional development a priority is New York City's Community School District No. 2. A member of the New Standards Project, Community School District No. 2 is in its third year of standards-based reform. Among its findings: One-shot workshops on isolated topics don't work, says Denise Levine, the district's director of standards. Instead, the district has begun offering on-site graduate-level courses in subjects like advanced mathematics.

A group of teachers also meets once a month to discuss articles on standards-based reform and issues about standards. (One current issue, Levine says, is how schools can balance an emphasis on literacy with high standards.) Principals have their own network focusing on standards issues, and several teachers are working on research in their classrooms. In addition, every school has an outside consultant in staff development who works with teachers two to three days a week.

Finding time for such professional development can be difficult, Levine allows. As part of its standards effort, for example, the district has extended the school day and year so that children have more time to reach the new goals. But, asks Levine, "if you extend the school year into July and do professional development in August, when do your teachers get a break?" Some schools hold breakfast or lunch meetings once a week to address standards.

At the same time, too, the district has had to reassess its spending. "It's not that you need extra resources," says Levine, "but you do have to rethink how you spend them." Among the changes: The district no longer uses aides or paraprofessionals, and many schools don't have assistant principals.

"We just gave up a lot of administrative overhead," Levine says.

The district, which currently spends 5 percent of its budget on professional development, has also received grants from the federal Office of Educational Research and Improvement, the National Science Foundation, and some private foundations.

The effort and the investment have begun to pay off, Levine says: According to test scores, the district currently ranks No. 2 in the city. Before standards and other reforms, the district ranked 13th.

Buzzword or reform?

But will standards last? Advocates acknowledge that the movement has a certain momentum now. Most states have used federal money to establish standards, and if they hold schools accountable for those standards with rigorous assessments, that momentum could continue. So long as parents and the business community continue to express their dissatisfaction with public schools and clamor for rigor, the push for standards could continue as well. "It's a movement born largely of dissatisfaction," says J.E. Stone, a professor of education at East Tennessee State University who views the standards movement skeptically.

Even proponents worry that standards will become a buzzword rather than a reform, or that as school districts realize how difficult standards-based reform really is, they'll revert to the belief that high standards are necessary for only the top 20 percent of U.S. students.

Schwartz cautions against that impulse: "This whole movement is only worth doing if it's accompanied by a concerted effort to focus on kids at the bottom." ◆

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Selected Readings on School Reform

Teacher Talent

Two terrific entries lead off our teacher section. First, Heather Mac Donald's superb *City Journal* essay explains "Why Johnny's Teacher Can't Teach." Mac Donald endured hours of ed. school nonsense to deliver this investigative report. She pulls no punches in her searing indictment of these institutions and their ideological "thoughtworld," shabby standards, and ivory-tower perspectives. Her observations are supported in "A Confederacy of Constructivists," an original contribution from Richard Slettvet, who recounts his own unhappy ed. school experience. Slettvet, who was expelled from a teacher certification program, is a nationally published writer and adjunct instructor of business and economics for City University, Bellevue, Washington.

Economists Dale Ballou and Michael Podgursky are among the most informed critics of the teacher preparation establishment. Here we serve up a double portion of their research. Writing in *The Public Interest*, they critically examine the recommendations of the National Commission on Teaching and America's Future (NCTAF), and build "The Case Against Teacher Certification." In their *Education Week* article, "Some unanswered Questions Concerning National Board Certification of Teachers," Ballou and Podgursky argue that national board certification isn't all it's cracked up to be.

Then what *should* we do to strengthen the teaching ranks? In "Squeezing the Lemons of Teaching," Chris Satullo of *The Philadelphia Inquirer* publicizes Robert Strauss's unusual—and we think intriguing—solution: let parents choose their child's teacher each year. Those without any "clients" would be out of a job.

Ellen Belcher, a perceptive and reform-minded editor at the *Dayton Daily News*, recently went undercover as a "temporary substitute" teacher in several Dayton-area schools—and lived to tell about it. "There Are No Secrets in Schools" was the final installment in a marvelous five-part series, in which Belcher reflects on the lessons she learned from life in the trenches. If you'd like to see the whole series, you can access it through the *Dayton Daily News* web site at www.activedayton.com/ddn.

Our final article in this section ("Divided They Stand" by Peter Schrag of *The New Republic*) is already old news—at the time of printing, the NEA rank-and-file had just left the AFT at the alter. Why then include it? To remind you of the fate we've barely escaped.

BRW

City Journal, Spring 1998

Why Johnny's Teacher Can't Teach

Heather Mac Donald

Americans' nearly last-place finish in the Third International Mathematics and Sciences Study of student achievement caused widespread consternation this February, except in the one place it should have mattered most: the nation's teacher education schools. Those schools have far more important things to do than worrying about test scores—things like stamping out racism in aspiring teachers. "Let's be honest," darkly commanded Professor Valerie Henning-Piedmont to a lecture hall of education students at Columbia University's Teachers College last February. "What labels do you place on young people based on your biases?" It would be difficult to imagine a less likely group of bigots than these idealistic young people, happily toting around their *Handbooks of Multicultural Education* and their exposés of sexism in the classroom. But Teachers College knows better. It knows that most of its students, by virtue of being white, are complicitous in an unjust power structure.

The crusade against racism is just the latest irrelevancy to seize the nation's teacher education schools. For over 80 years, teacher education in America has been in the grip of an immutable dogma, responsible for endless educational nonsense. That dogma may be summed up in the phrase: Anything But Knowledge. Schools are about many things, teacher educators say (depending on the decade)—self-actualization, following one's joy, social adjustment, or multicultural sensitivity—but the one thing they are not about is knowledge. Oh sure, educators will occasionally allow the word to pass their lips, but it is always in a compromised position, as in "constructing one's own knowledge," or "contextualized knowledge." Plain old knowledge, the kind passed down in books, the kind for which Faust sold his soul, *that* is out.

Ed schools purvey multicultural sensitivity, metacognition, community-building—anything but knowledge.

The education profession currently stands ready to tighten its already vise-like grip on teacher credentialing, persuading both the federal government and the states to "professionalize" teaching further. In New York, as elsewhere, that means closing off any routes to the classroom that do not pass through an education school. But before caving in to the educrats' pressure, we had better take a hard look at what education schools actually teach.

The course in "Curriculum and Teaching in Elementary Education" that Professor Anne Nelson (a pseudonym) teaches at the City College of New York is a good place to start. Dressed in a tailored brown suit with close-cropped hair, Nelson is a charismatic teacher, with a commanding repertoire of voices and personae. And yet, for all her obvious experience and common sense, her course is a remarkable exercise in vacuousness.

As with most education classes, the title of Professor Nelson's course doesn't give a clear sense of what it is about. Unfortunately, Professor

Nelson doesn't, either. The semester began, she said in a pre-class interview, by "building a community, rich of talk, in which students look at what they themselves are doing by in-class writing." On this, the third meeting of the semester, Professor Nelson said that she would be "getting the students to develop the subtext of what they're doing." I would soon discover why Professor Nelson was so vague.

"Developing the subtext" turns out to involve a chain reaction of solipsistic moments. After taking attendance and—most admirably—quickly checking the students' weekly handwriting practice, Professor Nelson begins the main work of the day: generating feather-light "texts," both written and oral, for immediate group analysis. She asks the students to write for seven minutes on each of three questions: "What excites me about teaching?" "What concerns me about teaching?" and then, the moment that brands this class as hopelessly steeped in the Anything But Knowledge credo: "What was it like to do this writing?"

This last question triggers a quickening volley of self-reflexive turns. After the students read aloud their predictable reflections on teaching, Professor Nelson asks: "What are you hearing?" A young man states the obvious: "Everyone seems to be reflecting on what their anxieties are." This is too straightforward an answer. Professor Nelson translates into ed-speak: "So writing gave you permission to think on paper about what's there." Ed-speak dresses up the most mundane processes in dramatic terminology—one doesn't just write, one is "given permission to think on the paper"; one doesn't converse, one "negotiates meaning." Then, like a champion tennis player finishing off a set, Nelson reaches for the ultimate level of self-reflexivity and drives it home: "What was it like to listen to each other's responses?"

The self-reflection isn't over yet, however. The class next moves into small groups—along with in-class writing, the most pervasive gimmick in progressive classrooms today—to discuss a set of student-teaching guidelines. After ten minutes, Nelson interrupts the by-now lively and largely off-topic conversations, and asks: "Let's talk about how you felt in these small groups." The students are picking up ed-speak. "It shifted the comfort zone," reveals one. "It was just acceptance; I felt the vibe going through the group." Another adds: "I felt really comfortable; I had trust there." Nelson senses a "teachable moment." "Let's talk about that," she interjects. "We are building trust in this class; we are learning how to work with each other."

Now, let us note what this class was not: it was not about how to keep the attention of eight-year-olds or plan a lesson or make the Pilgrims real to first-graders. It did not, in other words, contain any material (with the exception of the student-teacher guidelines) from the outside world. Instead, it continuously spun its own subject matter out of itself. Like a relationship that consists of obsessively analyzing the relationship, the only content of the course was the course itself.

How did such navel gazing come to be central to teacher education? It is the almost inevitable consequence of the Anything But Knowledge doctrine, born in a burst of quintessentially American anti-intellectual fervor in the wake of World War I. Educators within the federal government and at Columbia's Teachers College issued a clarion call to schools: cast off the traditional academic curriculum and start preparing young people for the demands of modern life. America is a forward-looking country, they boasted; what need have we for such impractical disciplines as Greek, Latin, and higher math? Instead, let the students then flooding the schools take such useful courses as family membership, hygiene, and the worthy use of leisure time. "Life adjustment," not wisdom or learning, was to be the goal of education.

The early decades of this century forged the central educational fallacy of our time: that one can think without having anything to think about. Knowledge is changing too fast to be transmitted usefully to students, argued William Heard Kilpatrick of Teachers College, the most influential American educator of the century; instead of teaching children dead facts and figures, schools should teach them "critical thinking," he wrote in 1925. What matters is not what you know, but whether you know how to look it up, so that you can be a "lifelong learner."

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Ed-speak dresses up the most mundane processes in dramatic terminology—one doesn't just write, one is "given permission to think on the paper."

Two final doctrines rounded out the indelible legacy of progressivism. First, Harold Rugg's *The Child-Centered School* (1928) shifted the locus of power in the classroom from the teacher to the student. In a child-centered class, the child determines what he wants to learn. Forcing children into an existing curriculum inhibits their self-actualization, Rugg argued, just as forcing them into neat rows of chairs and desks inhibits their creativity. The teacher becomes an enabler, an advisor; not, heaven forbid, the transmitter of a preexisting body of ideas, texts, or, worst of all, facts. In today's jargon, the child should "construct" his own knowledge rather than passively receive it. By the late 1920s, students were moving their chairs around to form groups of "active learners" pursuing their own individual interests, and, instead of a curriculum, the student-centered classroom followed just one principle: "activity leading to further activity without badness," in Kilpatrick's words. Today's educators still present these seven-decade-old practices as cutting-edge.

As E. D. Hirsch observes, the child-centered doctrine grew out of the romantic idealization of children. If the child was, in Wordsworth's words, a "Mighty Prophet! Seer Blest!" then who needs teachers? But the Mighty Prophet emerged from student-centered schools ever more ignorant and incurious as the schools became more vacuous. By the 1940s and 1950s, schools were offering classes in how to put on nail polish and how to act on a date. The notion that learning should push students out of their narrow world had been lost.

The final cornerstone of progressive theory was the disdain for report cards and objective tests of knowledge. These inhibit authentic learning, Kilpatrick argued; and he carried the day, to the eternal joy of students everywhere.

The foregoing doctrines are complete bunk, but bunk that has survived virtually unchanged to the present. The notion that one can teach "metacognitive" thinking in the abstract is senseless. Students need to learn *something* to learn how to learn at all. The claim that prior knowledge is superfluous because one can always look it up, preferably on the Internet, is equally senseless. Effective research depends on preexisting knowledge. Moreover, if you don't know in what century the atomic bomb was dropped without rushing to an encyclopedia, you cannot fully participate in society. Lastly, Kilpatrick's influential assertion that knowledge was changing too fast to be taught presupposes a blinkered definition of knowledge that excludes the great works and enterprises of the past.

The rejection of testing rests on premises as flawed as the push for "critical thinking skills." Progressives argue that if tests exist, then teachers will "teach to the test"—a bad thing, in their view. But why would "teaching to a test" that asked for, say, the causes of the Civil War be bad for students? Additionally, progressives complain that testing provokes rote memorization—again, a bad thing. One of the most tragically influential education professors today, Columbia's Linda Darling-Hammond, director of the National Commission on Teaching and America's Future, an advocacy group for increased teacher "professionalization," gives a telling example of what she considers a criminally bad test in her hackneyed 1997 brief for progressive education, *The Right to Learn*. She points disdainfully to the following question from the 1995 New York State Regents Exam in biology (required for high school graduation) as "a rote recall of isolated facts and vocabulary terms":"The tissue which conducts organic food through a vascular plant is composed of: (1) Cambium cells; (2) Xylem cells; (3) Phloem cells; (4) Epidermal cells."

Only a know-nothing could be offended by so innocent a question. It never occurs to Darling-Hammond that there may be a joy in mastering the parts of a plant or the organelles of a cell, and that such memorization constitutes learning. Moreover, when, in the progressives' view, will a student ever be held accountable for such knowledge? Does

Darling-Hammond believe that a student can pursue a career in, say, molecular biology or in medicine without it? And how else will that learning be demonstrated, if not in a test? But of course such testing will produce unequal results, and that is the real target of Darling-Hammond's animus.

Once you dismiss real knowledge as the goal of education, you have to find something else to do. That's why the Anything But Knowledge doctrine leads directly to Professor Nelson's odd course. In thousands of education schools across the country, teachers are generating little moments of meaning, which they then subject to instant replay. Educators call this "constructing knowledge," a fatuous label for something that is neither construction nor knowledge but mere game playing. Teacher educators, though, possess a primitive relationship to words. They believe that if they just label something "critical thinking" or "community-building," these activities will magically occur.

For all the ed school talk of freedom from the past, teacher education in this century has been more unchanging than Miss Havisham. Like aging vestal virgins, today's schools lovingly guard the ancient flame of progressivism. Since the 1920s they have not had a single new idea; they have merely gussied up old concepts in new rhetoric, most recently in the jargon of minority empowerment. To enter an education classroom, therefore, is to witness a timeless ritual, embedded in an authority structure of unions and state education departments as rigid as the Vatican.

It is a didactic ritual as well. The education professor's credo is: As I do unto you, so shall you do unto your students. The education professor "models" how she wants her students to teach by her own classroom methods. Such a practice is based on a glaring fallacy—that methods that work passably well with committed 22-year-olds, paying $1,800 a course for your wisdom, will translate seamlessly to a class of seven- or twelve-year-olds.

The Anything But Knowledge credo leaves education professors and their acolytes free to concentrate on far more pressing matters than how to teach the facts of history or the rules of sentence construction. "Community-building" is one of their most urgent concerns. Teacher educators conceive of their classes as sites of profound political engagement, out of which the new egalitarian order will emerge. A case in point is Columbia's required class, "Teaching English in Diverse Social and Cultural Contexts," taught by Professor Barbara Tenney (a pseudonym). "I want to work at a very conscious level with you to build community in this class," Tenney tells her attentive students on the first day of the semester this spring. "You can do it consciously, and you ought to do it in your own classes." Community-building starts by making nameplates for our desks. Then we all find a partner to interview about each other's "identity." Over the course of the semester, each student will conduct two more "identity" interviews with different partners. After the interview, the inevitable self-reflexive moment arrives, when Tenney asks: "How did it work?" This is a sign that we are on our way to "constructing knowledge."

A hallmark of community-building is its overheated rhetoric. The education professor acts as if she were facing a pack of snarling Serbs and Croats, rather than a bunch of well-mannered young ladies (the vast majority of education students), hoping for a good grade. So the community-building assignments attack nonexistent problems of conflict. Tenney, sporting a black leather miniskirt and a cascade of blond curls, hands out a sheet of paper and asks us to respond to the questions: "What climate would allow you to do your best work? How should a class act to encourage open and honest and critical dialogue?" We write for a while, then read our response to our interview partner.

Now is this question really necessary, especially for a group of college graduates? Good classroom etiquette is hardly a mystery. In the evil traditional classroom, and probably also at Teachers College, if a student calls another a fathead, thus discouraging "open and honest and critical dialogue," the teacher would simply reprimand him, and everyone would understand perfectly well what just happened and why. Consensus already exists on civil behavior. But the education classroom, lacking a pressing agenda in concrete knowledge, has to "problematize" the most automatic social routines.

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Of course, no amount of writing about the conditions for "open dialogue" can change the fact that discussion is not open on many issues at Teachers College and other progressive bastions. "If you don't demonstrate the correct point of view," says a student, "people are hostile. There's a herd mentality here." A former student of Tenney's describes the difficulties of dissent from the party line on racism: "There's nothing to be gained from challenging it. If you deny that the system inherently privileges whites, you're 'not taking responsibility for your position in racism.'" Doubtless, it would never occur to Professor Tenney that the problem this student describes impedes community-building.

All this artificial "community-building," however gratifying to the professors, has nothing to do with learning. Learning is ultimately a solitary activity: we have only one brain, and at some point we must exercise it in private. One could learn an immense amount about Schubert's lieder or calculus without ever knowing the name of one's seatmate. Such a view is heresy to the education establishment, determined, as Rita Kramer has noted, to eradicate any opportunity for individual accomplishment, with its sinister risk of superior achievement. For the educrats, the group is the irreducible unit of learning. Fueling this principle is the gap in achievement between whites and Asians, on the one hand, and other minorities on the other. Unwilling to adopt the discipline and teaching practices that would help reduce that gap, the education establishment tries to conceal it under group projects.

And so the ultimate community-building mechanism is the ubiquitous "collaborative group." No activity is too solitary to escape assignment to a group: writing, reading, researching, thinking—all are better done with many partners, according to educational dogma. If you see an ed school class sitting up in straight rows, call a doctor, because it means the professor has had a heart attack and couldn't arrange the class into groups.

For all their "progressive" sympathies, not all ed students like this regime. "I'm a socialist at heart," says one of Tenney's students, establishing her bona fides, "but some tasks, like writing, are not collaborative. It's hard when someone loses their voice." Another Columbia student in the Education Administration program complains that "teachers here let the group projects run wild." At $1,800 a course, it's frustrating "when the last four sessions of a class are group projects that are all garbage." Lastly, small group discussions have a habit of careening off the assigned topic. The professors rarely intervene, however, says a Teachers College student, "because they don't want to interfere with the interaction."

"If you don't demonstrate the correct point of view," says a student, "people are hostile. There's a herd mentality here."

The elevation of the group entails the demotion of teachers—yet another plank in the Anything But Knowledge platform. To accord teachers any superior role in the classroom would be to acknowledge an elite hierarchy of knowledge, possessed by some but not all, at least without effort. Teachers traditionally represent elitism, learning, authority—everything that progressivism scorns—and so they must be relegated to the role of mere facilitators for the all-important group.

Linda Darling-Hammond's description of collaborative learning perfectly captures how inextricable the political is from the educational in progressive theory. "Whereas traditional classrooms tend to be still but for the sound of teacher talking, learning-centered classrooms feature student talk and collective action." (The "learning-centered classroom" is Darling-Hammond's jargon for a student-centered classroom.) "Collective action"—how exciting! But though lots of undirected "student talk" hardly seems conducive to learning, progressives abhor quiet. David Schaafsma, one of Columbia's more politicized teachers, told his English Methods class of visiting a quiet third-grade class in the Bronx, explaining: "It terrifies me when kids are really really still. They've got to move." It never occurs to these apostles of the Free Self that for many inner-city children, reaching a state of calm attention is a wonderful achievement.

Collaborative learning leads naturally to another tic of the progressive classroom: "brainstorming." Rather than lecture to a class, the teacher asks the class its opinion about something and lists the responses on the blackboard. Nothing much happens after that; brainstorming, like various forms of community-building, appears to be an end in itself. Hunter College professor Faith DiCaprio (a pseudonym) recently used two levels of brainstorming—whole group and small group—with her "Language and Literacy in Early Childhood" class. The class had just read *Wally's Stories* by Vivian Paley, essentially a transcript of freewheeling discussions among kindergartners in a progressive classroom. First, DiCaprio asked her students what they liked about the book. As students called out their responses—"I liked how she didn't correct the students," "She reminded us why a child-centered room is so necessary: she didn't intrude on their conversation"—DiCaprio writes their responses in abbreviated ed-speak on big posted sheets of paper: "Tolerance: they negotiated meaning" and "Created safe arena."

After DiCaprio fills up the posted pages, nothing happens. Nothing needs to happen, for the lists of responses are visible proof of how much the class already knows. We have just "constructed knowledge." On to the next brainstorming exercise. This time, it's a twofer—brainstorming plus collaborative learning. DiCaprio breaks the class into small groups. Their assignment: list and categorize the topics discussed by the kindergartners in *Wally's Stories*. So the students dutifully make lists of fairies, food, plants, witches, and other meaty matters. One outspoken girl enthuses to her group: "And the kids were smart, they were like, 'The turnips push up with the roots,' and I was like, 'How'd they know that?'" After the groups complete their lists, they read them to the rest of the class. Learning tally? Almost zero.

The consequences of the Anything But Knowledge credo for intellectual standards have been dire. Education professors are remarkably casual when it comes to determining whether their students actually know anything, rarely asking them, for example, what can you tell us about the American Revolution? The ed schools incorrectly presume that the students will have learned everything they need to know in their other or previous college courses, and that the teacher certification exams will screen out people who didn't.

Even if college education were reliably rigorous and comprehensive, education majors aren't the students most likely to profit from it. Nationally, undergraduate education majors have lower SAT and ACT scores than students in any other program of study. Only 16 percent of education majors scored in the top quartile of 1992–93 graduates, compared with 33 percent of humanities majors. Education majors were overrepresented in the bottom quartile, at 30 percent. In New York City, many education majors have an uncertain command of English—I saw one education student at City College repeatedly write "choce" for "choice"—and appear altogether ill at ease in a classroom. To presume *anything* about this population without a rigorous content exit exam is unwarranted.

The laissez-faire attitude toward student knowledge rests on "principled" grounds, as well as on see-no-evil inertia. Many education professors embrace the facile post-structuralist view that knowledge is always political. "An education program can't have content [knowledge] specifics," explains Migdalia Romero, chair of Hunter College's Department of Curriculum and

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Teaching, "because then you have a point of view. Once you define exactly what finite knowledge is, it becomes a perspective." The notion that a culture could possess a pre-political common store of texts and ideas is anathema to the modern academic.

The most powerful dodge regurgitates William Heard Kilpatrick's classic "critical thinking" scam. Asked whether a future teacher should know the date of the 1812 war, Professor Romero replied: "Teaching and learning is not about dates, facts, and figures, but about developing critical thinking." When pressed if there were not *some* core facts that a teacher or student should know, she valiantly held her ground. "There are two ways of looking at teaching and learning," she replied. "Either you are imparting knowledge, giving an absolute knowledge base, or teaching and learning is about dialogue, a dialogue that helps to internalize and to raise questions." Though she offered the disclaimer "of course you need both," Romero added that teachers don't have to know everything, because they can always look things up.

Romero's tolerance of potential teacher ignorance perfectly reflects New York State's official policy on learning, a sellout to progressivism in its preference for "concepts" and "critical thinking" over measurable knowledge. The Regents' much-vaunted 1996 "student learning standards" are vacuous evasions of facts and knowledge, containing not a single book or document or historical fact that students should know. Literature? The word isn't mentioned. Instead, proclaim the standards in classic educationese, "students will listen, speak, read, and write for literary response and expression"—literally a meaningless statement, matched in its meaninglessness only by the next "English Language Arts" standard: "Students will listen, speak, read, and write for social interaction." Teachers need to get hold of the third level of documentation accompanying the standards to find any specific historical figures or events or books, but there, excessive detail and gaseous generalization will overwhelm them.

But what New York State expects of its students is a model of rigor compared to what it formally expects of its teachers. The State Teacher Certification Exams are a complete abdication of the state's responsibility for ensuring an educated teaching force. If any teachers in the state know anything about American history, English literature, or chemistry, it is a complete accident, for the state's highest education authorities have not the slightest interest in finding out. The Liberal Arts and Sciences Test, the ticket to a teacher's first five years in a classroom, contains absolutely no substance; at most, it tests reading skills. The test preparation booklet is a classic of educationese. The exam section on "Historical and Social Scientific Awareness" (note: not "knowledge"), for example, tests teachers' "understanding [of] the interrelatedness of historical, geographic, cultural, economic, political and social issues and factors."

Now, by loading on the different types of "issues and factors" that prospective teachers are supposed to understand, the exam ensures that they need know nothing in particular. The only thing that test takers do have to know is the multicultural dogma that there is no history, only "multiple perspectives" on history. The certification exam asks prospective teachers to "analyze multiple perspectives within U.S. society regarding major historical and contemporary issues"—*not* history, but "historical *issues*," and not even "historical issues," but "multiple perspectives" on "historical issues." Such a demand is ripe for spouting off, say, on the "Native American perspective" on the Western expansion, without having the slightest idea what fueled that expansion, when and where it occurred, who peopled it, and what its consequences were. In fairness, the Content Specialty Tests teachers must take for permanent certification are much more substantive, especially in science and math, but only one-third of the teachers seeking provisional certification ever make it that far.

The pedagogy portion of the Liberal Arts and Sciences certification exam resembles a catechism more than an exam. "Multiple perspectives" are clearly not acceptable in answering such loaded questions as: "Analyze how classroom environments that respect diversity foster positive student experiences," or, "Analyze how schoolwide structures (i.e., tracking) and classroom factors (e.g., homogeneous versus heterogeneous grouping [presumably by ability], student-teacher interactions) may affect students' self-concepts and learning." Will a would-be teacher who answers that classrooms should stress a common culture or that ability-grouping promotes excellence remain just a would-be teacher? One hopes not.

The exams echo with characteristic ed school verbiage. The student doesn't learn, he achieves "learning processes and outcomes"; the teacher doesn't teach, she "applies strategies for facilitating learning in instructional situations." Disregard for language runs deep in the teacher education profession, so much so that ed school professors tolerate glaring language deficiencies in schoolchildren. Last January, Manhattan's Park West High School shut down for a day, so that its faculty could bone up on progressive pedagogy. One of the more popular staff development seminars was "Using Journals and Learning Logs." The presenters—two Park West teachers and a representative from the New York City Writing Project, an anti-grammar initiative run by Lehman College's Education School—proudly passed around their students' journal writing, including the following representative entry on "Matriarchys v. pratiarchys [sic]": "The different between Matriarchys and patriarchys is that when the mother is in charge of the house. sometime the children do whatever they want. But sometimes the mother can do both roll as a mother and as a father too and they can do it very good." A more personal entry described how the author met her boyfriend: "He said you are so kind I said you noticed and then he hit me on my head. I made-believe I was crying and when he came naire me I slaped him right in his head and than I ran . . . to my grandparients home and he was right behind me. Thats when he asked did I have a boyfriend."

The ubiquitous journal-writing cult holds that such writing should go uncorrected. Fortunately, some Park West teachers bridled at the notion. "At some point, the students go into the job market, and they're not being judged 'holistically,'" protested a black teacher, responding to the invocation of the state's "holistic" model for grading writing. Another teacher bemoaned the Board of Ed's failure to provide guidance on teaching grammar. "My kids are graduating without skills," he lamented.

"I'm not going to spend my life doing error diagnosis! I'm not going to spend my weekend on that!"

Such views, however, were decidedly in the minority. "Grammar is related to purpose," soothed the Lehman College representative, educrat code for the proposition that asking students to write grammatically on topics they are not personally "invested in" is unrealistic. A Park West presenter burst out with a more direct explanation for his chilling indifference to student incompetence: "I'm not going to spend my life doing error diagnosis! I'm not going to spend my weekend on that!" Correcting papers used to be part of the necessary drudgery of a teacher's job. No more, with the advent of enlightened views about "self-expression" and "writing with intentionality."

However easygoing the education establishment is regarding future teachers' knowledge of history, literature, and science, there is one topic that it assiduously monitors: their awareness of racism. To many teacher educators, such an awareness is the most important tool a young teacher can bring to the classroom. It cannot be developed too early. Rosa, a bouncy and enthusiastic junior at Hunter College, has completed only her first semester of education courses, but already she has mastered the most important lesson: America is a racist, imperialist country, most like, say, Nazi Germany. "We are lied to by the very institutions we have come to trust," she recalls from her first-semester reading. "It's all government that's inventing these lies, such as Western heritage."

The source of Rosa's newfound wisdom, Donaldo Macedo's *Literacies of Power: What Americans Are Not Allowed to Know*, is an execrable book by any measure. But given its target audience—impressionable education students—it comes close to being a crime. Widely assigned at Hunter, and in use in approximately 150 education schools nationally, it is an illiterate, barbarically ignorant Marxist-inspired screed against America. Macedo opens his first chapter, "Literacy for Stupidification: The Pedagogy of Big Lies," with a quote from Hitler and quickly segues to Ronald Reagan: "While busily calling out slogans from their patriotic vocabulary memory warehouse, these same Americans dutifully vote . . . for Ronald Reagan, giving him a landslide victory . . . . These same voters ascended [sic] to Bush's morally high-minded call to apply international laws against Saddam Hussein's tyranny and his invasion of Kuwait." Standing against this wave of ignorance and imperialism is a lone 12-year-old from Boston, whom Macedo celebrates for his courageous refusal to recite the Pledge of Allegiance.

What does any of this have to do with teaching? Everything, it turns out. In the 1960s, educational progressivism took on an explicitly political cast: schools were to fight institutional racism and redistribute power. Today, Columbia's Teachers College holds workshops on cultural and political "oppression," in which students role-play ways to "usurp the existing power structure," and the New York State Regents happily call teachers the "ultimate change agents." To be a change agent, one must first learn to "critique" the existing social structure. Hence, the assignment of such propaganda as Macedo's book.

But however bad the influence of Macedo's puerile politics on future teachers, it pales compared to the model set by his writing style. A typical sentence: "This inability to link the reading of the word with the world, if not combated, will further exacerbate already feeble democratic institutions [sic] and the unjust, asymmetrical power relations that characterize the hypocritical nature of contemporary democracies." Anyone who dares criticize Macedo for his prose is merely trying to "suffocate discourses," he says, with the "blind and facile call for clarity." That Hunter College could assign this gross betrayal of the English language to future teachers is a sufficient reason for closing its education program down. Rosa's control of English is shaky enough as it is; to fill her ears with such subliterate writing represents professional malpractice.

But Macedo is just one of the political tracts that Hunter force-fed the innocent Rosa in her first semester. She also learned about the evils of traditional children's stories from education radical Herbert Kohl. In *Should We Burn Babar?* Kohl weighs the case for and against the dearly beloved children's classic, *Babar the Elephant*, noting in passing that it prevented him from "question[ing] the patriarchy earlier." He decides—but let Rosa expound the message of Kohl's book: "[*Babar*]'s like a children's book, right? [But] there's an underlying meaning about colonialism, about like colonialism, and is it OK, it's really like it's OK, but it's like really offensive to these people." Better burn Babar now!

In New York, as in almost every state, the focus on diversity and anti-racism indoctrination comes with the highest imprimatur. The State Board of Regents requires all prospective teachers to have at least one course in "diversity"; many local ed schools pride themselves on weaving "diversity" into all their courses. The nation's most influential education school, Teachers College, promotes the most extreme race consciousness in its mandated diversity program. In her large lecture course, Professor Valerie Henning-Piedmont sneered at "liberal correctness," which she defined as "I don't see the color of my students." Such misguided color blindness, she said, equals: "I don't see the students."

Expect the folly only to grow worse. A draft report from the Regents Task Force on Teaching, grousing that future teachers lack sufficient grounding in diversity, calls for special training in such challenges as "teaching both sexes," thus further legitimizing the ludicrous proposition that schools mistreat girls. The Regents also make recruiting a more "diverse" teaching force a top priority, based on the assumption that minority students learn best from minority teachers. Currently, 34 percent of teachers in New York City, and 15 percent statewide, are minorities, compared to a student population that is 83 percent minority in New York City and 43 percent statewide. Asked what evidence the Regents have for the proposition that the color of the teaching force correlates with achievement, Doris T. Garner, staff coordinator for the Task Force, admitted, "I don't think hard evidence exists that would say that." If black students should be taught by black teachers, should white students be taught by white teachers? "I would not recommend that," replied Garner, fearless of illogic.

Since the Regents are making teacher diversity a top priority, something is going to have to give: Currently, blacks fail the content-free Liberal Arts and Sciences Test of provisional certification at a rate five times that of whites. But that's just a temporary obstacle, because the test-bias hounds may be already closing in for the kill: the discovery that the exam discriminates against minorities. The Regents' most recent paper on teacher training warned that the certification exam "must exclude language that would jeopardize candidates, and include language and content that reflects diversity." Now, the only candidates who would be jeopardized by the exam's language are those, of any color, who are deeply troubled by hot air. As for "cultural bias," at present the exam is a rainbow of multicultural examples and propaganda—one sample question, for example, features a fawning review of a "multicultural dance work that is truly representative of the diversity of New York." Don't be surprised if the complete absence of any "bias" in the exam, however, fails to prevent a concerted, taxpayer-funded effort to redraft it so as to guarantee an equal pass rate among all groups of takers.

Though the current diversity battle cry is "All students can learn," the educationists continually lower expectations of what they should learn. No longer are students expected to learn all their multiplication tables in the third grade, as has been traditional. But while American educators come up with various theories about fixed cognitive phases to explain why our children should go slow, other nationalities trounce us. Sometimes, we're trounced in our own backyards, causing cognitive dissonance in local teachers.

A young student at Teachers College named Susan describes incredulously a Korean-run preschool in Queens. To her horror, the school, the Holy Mountain School, violates every progressive tenet: rather than being "student-centered" and allowing each child to do whatever he chooses, the school imposes a curriculum on the children, based on the alphabet. "Each week, the children got a different letter," Susan recalls grimly. Such an approach violates "whole language" doctrine, which holds that students can't "grasp the [alphabetic] symbols without the whole word or the meaning or any context in their lives," in Susan's words. Holy Mountain's further infractions include teaching its wildly international students only in English and failing to provide an "anti-bias multicultural curriculum." The result? By the end of preschool the students learn English and are writing words. Here is true belief in the ability of all children to learn, for it is backed up by action.

Columbia's Teachers College holds workshops on cultural and political "oppression," in which students role-play ways to "usurp the existing power structure."

Across the city, young teachers are dumping progressive theories faster than Indonesian currency. For all the unctuous talk of diversity, many progressive tenets are dangerously ill adapted to inner-city classrooms. "They don't say 'boo' about this population," scoffs Samantha, a recent Hunter graduate now teaching in Brooklyn's Bedford-Stuyvesant section. "My course in multiculturalism had zero to do with the classroom."

A former dancer, Samantha was an open receptacle for progressive ideas. But her early efforts to follow the model have left her stranded. Her fourth-grade class is out of control. "I didn't set it up in a strict manner at the beginning," she laments. "I gave them too many choices; I did a lot of things wrong." Collaborative learning? Forget about it. "My kids resort to fighting immediately if I put them in groups." Samantha tried to use groups to make a poster on electricity. "It was mayhem; they couldn't stay quiet," she recalls.

The student-centered classroom is equally a fraud. "You can't give them choices," Samantha asserts flatly. Next year, with a new class, she will do things differently. "I will have everything set up to the last detail—their names on the desks, which notebooks to buy, how to label them. They need to know what hook to hang their coat on and where to go from there. Every minute of the day has to be scripted. You can't just say: 'Line up!' because they'll fight. Instead, you have to say: 'Boys, stand up, push in your chairs, and here are your line spots.'"

As for "metacognition," that is out as well. "My kids need the rote; they can't do half of six or four divided by two." Samantha is using the most unholy of unholies to teach her children to read—a basal reader, derided by the education establishment as spirit-killing. But the reader gives her specific skill sets to work on—above all, phonics and grammar. "My kids don't hear the correct sound of words at home, such as 'th' or the ending of words, so teaching reading is harder."

Journals, whole language, and "portfolio assessment" became more casualties of the real world at the Holy Cross School in the Bronx. The school recently hired a Teachers College graduate who arrived fired up with those student-centered methods. No more. Now she is working very hard on grammar, according to assistant principal William Kurtz. "Those [progressive] tools don't necessarily work for kids who can't read or tell you what a noun or a verb is," he says. In his own history class, Kurtz has discovered that he needs to be as explicit about study habits and research methods as Samantha is about classroom behavior. "When I give an essay question, I have to be very structured about going to the library and what resources to use. If you don't do that, they look up nothing."

The education establishment would be unfazed by these stories. Samantha and William, it would say, are still prisoners of the "deficit model." All these two benighted teachers can see is what their kids don't know, instead of building on their strengths. If those strengths are hip-hop music, for example, focus on that. But for heaven's sake, don't deny the children the benefits of a child-centered classroom.

In fact, the strict environment that Samantha plans is the best thing that could happen to her pupils. It is perhaps the only place they will meet order and civility. Samantha's children are "surrounded by violence," she says. Many are not interested in learning, because at home, "everyone is dissing everybody, or staying up late to get high. My kids are so emotionally beat up, they don't even know when they're out of their seats." A structured classroom is their only hope to learn the rules that the rest of society lives by. To eliminate structure for kids who have none in their lives is to guarantee failure.

Given progressive education's dismal record, all New Yorkers should tremble at what the Regents have in store for the state. The state's teacher education establishment, led by Columbia's Linda Darling-Hammond, has persuaded the Regents to make its monopoly on teacher credentialing total. Starting in 2003, according to a Regents plan steaming inexorably toward adoption, all teacher candidates must pass through an education school to be admitted to a classroom. We know, alas, what will happen to them there.

This power grab will be a disaster for children. By making ed school inescapable, the Regents will drive away every last educated adult who may not be willing to sit still for its foolishness but who could bring to the classroom unusual knowledge or experience. The nation's elite private schools are full of such people, and parents eagerly proffer tens of thousands of dollars to give their children the benefit of such skill and wisdom.

Amazingly, even the Regents, among the nation's most addled education bodies, sporadically acknowledge what works in the classroom. A Task Force on Teaching paper cites some of the factors that allow other countries to wallop us routinely in international tests: a high amount of lesson content (in other words, teacher-centered, not student-centered, learning), individual tracking of students, and a coherent curriculum. The state should cling steadfastly to its momentary insight, at odds with its usual policies, and discard its foolhardy plan to enshrine Anything But Knowledge as its sole education dogma. Instead of permanently establishing the teacher education status quo, it should search tirelessly for alternatives and for potential teachers with a firm grasp of subject matter and basic skills. Otherwise ed school claptrap will continue to stunt the intellectual growth of the Empire State's children. ●

A Confederacy of Constructivists

by Richard Slettvet

Myth 2:
Teachers Learn to
Teach in Colleges of Education
This myth floats pervasively (if uneasily) on the surface of society as a whole, but teachers don't believe it for a minute. Teachers know that they learned to teach on the job...and that their journey through teacher education was painfully dull, occasionally malevolent, and mostly beside the point.
William Ayers
To Teach: The Journey of a Teacher

Consider how reading pedagogy was taught at the University of Washington, Bothell K-8 Teacher Certification Program, which I attended in the Summer and Fall of 1996:

The only reading course in the program included no instruction in phonics, spelling, or vocabulary; no assignments or instruction about working with small groups of children, or large groups; nothing concerning the use of technology, the design of reading centers, or teaching different genres; no instruction in integrating reading with other parts of the curriculum; nothing about how to remediate.

We did, however, as scheduled on the course calendar, spend an entire one-hour-and-forty-minute class session discussing this important issue: "In what ways is teaching reading like buying a fast food hamburger?" I swear I am not making this up.

The professor devoted another session to a discussion of how children *feel* about reading, how they *feel* about themselves as readers, and whether they are *metacognitive* as readers. We spent at least a day trying to decide whether meaning resides within a book or within the reader. Yet another day was dedicated to inventing personal definitions of reading and literacy. (I know it when I see it.)

After the sixth class session, I e-mailed the professor that she hadn't taught us anything about how to teach reading. She responded, "I have taught you oddles (sic) about the teaching of reading. I would offer that you have failed to learn anything from me about the teaching of reading to this point." (Note the errors in spelling and sentence structure—I'll return to this issue shortly; note also the denial of accountability.)

The professor continued, "And I told you after day two, if you are looking for programs, ideas, skill boosters, etc., that you are most definitely not going to get that from me." No ideas! Imagine the possibilities. (During the eighth session, in response to a student's desperate plea for some practical methods for teaching reading, the professor would tell the teacher candidates, "I'm not going to give you any tools. I don't have any tools to give you." No tools!)

Instead, she wrote, "You are going to get a framework....actually you are going to build one that is morally and ethcially (sic) grounded from which you are going to collect and build a reading program of your own. I will not give you the program. That is something a workshop coordinator can do. I am trying to teach you something vastly more important. I am trying to teach you that real teaching is about thinking (sic) not about doing (emphasis added)....thinking very deeply and very thoroughly about what is the best thing to do for your students. Not to do what was best for you when you were a kiddo."

The Teacher Certification Program Director passionately defended this approach to teacher training. "In my best professional judgment," she reported to the Associate Dean, "it would be a breach of our professional responsibilities if we were to base our literacy instruction on any other foundation than that articulated by Professor [ ]." The Associate Dean found this explanation to be "completely convincing." The Dean concurred.

Interestingly, in fully quoting the reading professor in her report, the Program Director made several alterations to the professor's original wording and punctuation. She even corrected the reading professor's spelling error!

I'm not going to give you any tools. I don't have any tools to give you.
Reading Pedagogy Professor
University of Washington, Bothell

Incredibly, the reading professor committed frequent and flagrant mistakes in spelling, grammar, word usage, and punctuation. One single-page course handout contained more than 20 writing errors! Think of a mathematics prof who hasn't mastered the times tables, a music instructor who doesn't know the scales, a professor of accountancy who confuses debits and credits. "I don't really know what you are trying to communicate," the reading professor wrote to me. "Is it utter dispare (sic)?" It was.

Demonstrating just how far we have dumbed down the education system, the university wasn't terribly concerned about a literacy professor who hadn't mastered basic writing skills. "I will also not discuss here the conversations that I have had with Professor [ ] about strategies for taking more care in editing her documents," the Program Director reported. (The Deans were completely convinced.) This professor also taught the writing course.

It gets curiouser and curiouser:

While modeling how to work one-on-one with a student, the reading professor pointed to the book jacket photograph of children's author Shel Silverstein and said (to the imaginary child sitting at her side), "Uck, how would you like to meet *him*?" The Program Director asserted that such "modeling of ways to introduce a book to children" was "entirely within parameters of appropriate professional practice." What, I wonder, would Mr. Silverstein have to say on the issue?

The reading professor's understanding of remediation: "Remediation is dangerous. It suggests failure. It suggests one is not up to par with the 'haves' and that is morally wrong. There are too many outside of the indiviudal (sic), (sic) factors which contribute to ones (sic) not getting it in school to make their (sic) time in school a focus on remediation. Remediation is a pedagogy of blaming the victim."

The University of Washington, Bothell School of Education was founded on the philosophy of social constructivism, which posits that students construct knowledge in a social context. Hence, direct instruction is eschewed. Social constructivism explains a K-8 teacher certification reading program devoid of "tools," "programs," or "ideas." Instead, in a 10-week, four-credit course, guided by a professor who had never done so herself (this professor had never been a K-8 classroom teacher), each teacher candidate would "construct" everything that he or she would need as a first-year teacher. Bring on the kids!

Social constructivism explains a professor of reading and writing who had terrible writing skills. After all, this is the philosophy that gave us creative spelling, and whole language as Holy Writ. (And new math, but that's another story.)

Social constructivism explains spending one-quarter of the entire course in assessment ruminating about how "Assessment is like:" an apple, a house, baseball, a dog, children, and a burrito; the eight hours of class time spent discussing the bizarre musings of a phenomenologist; the assignment to create a poster, collage, song, or dance to demonstrate understanding of how children learn.

Social constructivism explains the classroom management professor's statement that no real learning takes place in schools until January. Everything up to that point is just getting the classroom organized, cooperative teams established, and so forth. (When a student asked how we as future teachers could justify such a concept to the public, the professor answered, "This isn't something you should ever show to the public." Indeed.)

Social constructivism explains the quarterly "reflection seminars"; the "reflective journals" and "reflection papers" that teacher candidates wrote and submitted for political correctness checks; and the daily periods to be set aside "to contemplate" at our internship classrooms. Remember, real teaching is about thinking, not about doing.

This isn't something you should ever show to the public.

Classroom Management Professor
University of Washington, Bothell

Thus, there were some assigned chapters out of Howard Gardner's *The Unschooled Mind*, but nothing about how to implement Gardner's theory of "multiple intelligences" in the classroom. That would be too practical, too direct. There was a photocopied reading assignment from David Perkins' *Smart Schools*, but no actual training for teacher candidates in the techniques of didactic instruction, coaching, or Socratic teaching that Perkins recommends. And while the *NCSS Curriculum Standards for Social Studies* concludes that "Prospective teachers need coaching and structured opportunities to develop their skills at using approaches such as lecture and discussion...panel discussions, debates, games, simulations...and learning programs," training in such techniques wasn't part of the program.

Social constructivism even explains why the professors of reading and writing, classroom management, learning theory, assessment, math, and possibly other courses had never been K-8 classroom teachers. As one professor noted, "We had to prove our social-constructivist credentials in order to get our jobs here." Ideology, apparently, has become the principal qualification for teacher educators...and indoctrination the principal objective of teacher education.

Why can't Johnny ______________ (fill in the blank)? Maybe it's because of the way his teachers were trained.

Richard Slettvet was expelled from teacher certification after receiving a 0.0 grade in reading pedagogy. Richard has published nationally on the role of parents in education; and in 1996, as a parent-volunteer, co-coached two 5th-grade math teams to 4th- and 5th-place finishes in the Washington State Math Championships. He is a former U.S. Navy Supply Corps Officer, and worked for many years in private industry. He currently works as an adjunct instructor of business and economics for City University, and part-time as an educational assistant in a public school program for severe-behavior-disordered middle-school students.

The Public Interest, Summer 1998

The case against teacher certification

DALE BALLOU AND MICHAEL PODGURSKY

THE system by which the nation trains and licenses its public school teachers recently came under sharp attack from an organization called the National Commission on Teaching and America's Future (NCTAF). In its 1996 report, *What Matters Most: Teaching for America's Future*, the commission charged that public schools employ large numbers of "unqualified" teachers, largely as a result of inadequate and poorly enforced standards for teacher training and licensing. The report was greeted as a "scathing indictment" of the current system and was widely publicized by the media.

What is the NCTAF? Its name notwithstanding, the NCTAF holds no "commission" from any elected official. It is a private organization, funded by the Rockefeller and Carnegie Foundations. Although the NCTAF claims that its report is not the work of education insiders, the largest block of members comes from major education organizations and education schools, including the two major teacher unions, the National Education Association (NEA) and American Federation of Teachers (AFT).

Remarkably, for a body that claims to represent the public interest on issues of education policy, the commission also includes leaders of private organizations that have a direct and substantial financial stake in the adoption of the commission's recommendations, among them the National Council for Accreditation of Teacher Education (NCATE) and the National Board for Professional Teaching Standards.

The NCTAF plan

The commission blames current conditions on state education departments and many teacher education programs:

> Because most states do not require schools of education to be accredited, only about 500 of the nation's 1200 education schools have met common professional standards. States, meanwhile, routinely approve all of their teacher education programs, including those that lack qualified faculty and are out of touch with new knowledge about teaching.

As a remedy, the NCTAF offers a sweeping plan to "professionalize" teaching, shifting control of accreditation and certification from local school boards and state education agencies to private education organizations. The commission's recommendations do not specify the curriculum of teacher training programs or the content of licensing examinations. Rather, the NCTAF would empower groups of education professionals to set standards for how teachers will be trained, tested, hired, and promoted. It will be up to these professional organizations to determine the curricular reforms needed to upgrade the teacher work force.

A key element of the commission's program calls for all teacher education programs to meet "professional standards" or be closed. By this, the commission means obtaining accreditation from NCATE. While all education schools must currently meet the standards required for accreditation by their state department of education, most do not obtain, or even try to secure, the approval of NCATE.

The commission also calls for establishing an independent professional board in every state to set standards for teacher licensing. In most states, teacher licensing (certification) requirements are currently set by state education departments.

By contrast, in law and medicine these standards are set by professional boards composed of respected practitioners. NCTAF proposes similar boards for teachers in order to set higher standards for teaching and to "create a fire wall between the political system and standards-setting process."

The commission's proposals extend to the assessment and compensation of experienced teachers as well. They call for states to establish goals and incentives for National Board Certification in every state and district, with the aim of certifying 105,000 teachers in this decade as "master teachers," one for every school in the United States. Teachers seeking this recognition submit portfolios for evaluation to the board (located just outside Detroit). The portfolios include videotapes of their teaching, lesson plans, and samples of student work. These materials are reviewed by "experts"—moonlighting teachers trained by the board. Teachers are also required to take a test at a regional site. Input from supervisors or parents is not solicited.

Remarkably, there has been very little public discussion of the merits of these recommendations. While the NCTAF's report received wide coverage in the media when released in the summer of 1996, the heaviest publicity was given to the commission's claims that public schools were employing large numbers of poorly trained and poorly qualified teachers. Given this, the commission's proposals to strengthen teacher training and licensing seemed uncontroversial, if not irresistible. Thus the commission succeeded almost at once in setting the terms of public debate about the way the nation will recruit and train new teachers.

The NCTAF remains active, vigorously promoting its proposals. It has issued a state-by-state report card grading states on their efforts to "professionalize" their teaching work forces, an effective device for pressuring states with low scores to accede to NCTAF demands. According to a commission press release, 11 states have formed "partnerships" with the NCTAF to "create programs and policies advancing [NCTAF] recommendations."

Recent activity within the federal government indicates that the NCTAF's influence is growing. The commission has worked closely with legislators in the current session of Congress on bills affecting teacher training and recruitment. Thirty-five million dollars in federal funds have been spent to support the efforts of the National Board for Professional Teaching Standards to certify master teachers. President Clinton's 1998 budget proposes $105 million more over the next five years.

The U.S. Department of Education has just awarded a $23 million contract to the University of Maryland and 25 partner organizations to build consensus on teaching and teacher training. This consortium will study states that are implementing NCTAF recommendations and, on the basis of this study, will disseminate information about "best practices." Among other tasks, the consortium will determine whether teachers certified by the National Board are more effective. This is surprising for two reasons. First, it is an admission that the administration is spending taxpayer dollars to promote an organization whose ability to identify good teaching—let alone promote it—is still in doubt. Second, the National Board for Professional Teaching Standards is itself one of the consortium's 25-member organizations. Indeed, the NCTAF and the principal organizations aligned with it are all members of the consortium, a circumstance that strongly compromises the objectivity of the forthcoming "study."

Not enough teacher training?

As economists who have studied labor markets for public and private school teachers, we have serious doubts about the direction in which the NCTAF proposals would take public policy. The NCTAF has misdiagnosed the problem of teacher quality. Many of the commission's proposals would do little or nothing to improve teacher performance. Indeed, the policies advocated by the NCTAF hold considerable potential to do harm.

Fourteen years ago, a prolonged debate about education quality in the United States was set off by the report of the National Commission on Excellence in Education, *A Nation at Risk*. This report called attention to the poor academic performance and weak cognitive skills of many teachers. College board scores of education students were below nearly all other majors and had been declining in relative terms through the 1970s. Too many graduates of teacher education programs did not understand the subjects they were teaching.

This concern is all but forgotten by the NCTAF, which focuses not on recruiting more talented people into the profession but on improving teacher training. The distinction has important implications, not least for schools of education. If the nation needs to recruit more talented people into the teaching profession, policies should be shaped with that end in mind. Such policies might well include ways of opening the profession to capable individuals who have not completed formal teacher training.

However, a rather different set of policy prescriptions emerges if it turns out that the problem with the teacher work force is simply inadequate training. If teachers need to be better trained, it is to schools, departments, and colleges of education that the nation will presumably turn, pouring in resources, strengthening requirements, and ensuring that state-of-the-art practices are disseminated throughout the community of teacher educators. True, some teacher training programs may be closed down, if they prove unable to upgrade themselves. But this would represent a transfer of resources within teacher education to the better programs, not a flow out of the professional education community. Education schools would play a larger role, not a smaller one, in shaping the teaching work force.

Given the composition of the commission, it is not surprising that it embraces more teacher training. But, in making its case, the NCTAF distorts the evidence on teacher qualifications, claiming, for example, that "in recent years, more than 50,000 people who lack the training required for their jobs have entered teaching annually on emergency or substandard licenses.... Twelve percent of all newly hired teachers have no training [in pedagogy and teaching methods], another fourteen percent enter without having fully met state standards."

Our own tabulations of the data failed to reproduce the commission's statistics. The most recent national survey to investigate the issue found that only 4.6 percent—not 12 percent—of newly hired public school teachers had taken no courses in teaching methods. The commission's claim that districts have been hiring 50,000 new teachers each year with emergency or substandard certificates is an even greater exaggeration. In fact, about 16,000 new public school teachers and instructors held "temporary, provisional, or emergency certificates" in 1991-92.

Even these figures overstate the problem, since, with the passage of time, unqualified teachers are either dismissed or make up their deficiencies. As a result, "unprepared" teachers constitute a negligible proportion of the entire work force. In 1993-94, fewer than 2 percent of all public school teachers held emergency or temporary certificates, the two principal "substandard" licenses.

Finally, teachers may be hired on emergency or temporary licenses because they are *better qualified* than fully licensed candidates. This possibility does not appear to have occurred to the NCTAF, which attributes these decisions to administrative incompetence or misplaced priorities. But consider the qualifications of new science teachers hired on substandard licenses. Of the 39 respondents to the latest national survey who fell in this category, 27 had a degree in one of the sciences. This ratio exceeds that for science teachers overall and strongly suggests that districts exploit loopholes in standard certification requirements to offer employment to individuals with superior subject-matter preparation.

Meanwhile, what has the commission to say about the academic competence of the work force? The NCTAF report is silent on this issue except for this remarkable assertion:

> Talented recruits are entering schools of education in record numbers. Due to recent reforms, both standards and interest have been steadily rising. By 1991, graduates of teacher education programs had higher levels of academic achievement than most college graduates, reversing the trends of the early 1980's.

A reader encountering this statement would probably assume that it referred to scores on the ACT, the SAT, or other standardized achievement tests. In fact, the commission's evidence for this proposition consists solely of self-reported college grade-point averages obtained from a series of Department of Education surveys of recent college graduates. Because the average GPA of education majors is higher than engineers, the commission concludes that education majors have higher levels of academic achievement.

This is preposterous. The commission ignores differences in grading standards familiar to virtually everyone in higher education. The average grade awarded in the education courses taken by 1992-93 graduates was 3.41 on a four-point scale. By contrast, the average in social-science courses was 2.96. In science and engineering it fell to 2.67. Yet science and engineering majors have significantly higher college board scores than education majors.

Misguided standards

By entrusting the accreditation of teacher education programs and the standardization of licensing requirements to professional organizations, the NCTAF expects to enhance the training that prospective teachers receive in pedagogical methods. Such training will reflect "state-of-the-art practices," "incorporating new knowledge" and an evolving "knowledge base for teaching" that makes clearer than before just what teachers should be doing in the classroom. Language of this kind is disconcertingly familiar: Public education in the United States has been marked by numerous waves of enthusiasm for newer and better methods that turn out to be passing fads. The succession of these fads does not inspire much confidence in the ability of education schools to ground their curricula in a reliable research literature. Indeed, the organization that the commission would entrust with the accreditation of teacher education programs—the NCATE—refers in its manual to "evolving standards," suggesting that this pattern of swinging one way and then the next may not end with the adoption of the NCTAF proposals.

Organizations that belong to this accrediting body have issued standards that are highly controversial and of dubious educational value. One of the constituent members of the NCATE is the National Council of Teachers of English. This council has been a major proponent of "whole language" instruction for reading in the primary grades—a teaching strategy that has come under withering attack from other educators and parents who are demanding that their confused children receive instruction in phonics. A similar process of rejection seems about to begin for the guidelines recently issued by the National Council for Teachers of Mathematics—another NCATE constituent organization. These guidelines, reflecting the predilection for "student-centered learning" that is popular in schools of education, have appalled many parents and educators who have described the results as "warm, fuzzy mathematics" and "rain-forest algebra." A requirement that teacher preparation programs be accredited by the NCATE could put such organizations in a position to insist that all reading and mathematics teachers be trained in methods widely rejected by the public and questioned by many educators.

The NCTAF report blithely ignores these controversies. Instead, the commission assures us that graduates of NCATE-accredited programs will be better prepared than non-NCATE teachers for the challenges of the classroom. They will supposedly stay in the profession longer and will exhibit a higher degree of professionalism in their relations with students and colleagues. The NCTAF report contains no evidence to support these claims. As far as we can determine, they are not true. Using data from surveys conducted by the Department of Education, we have compared NCATE to non-NCATE teachers on a number of dimensions related to professionalism and career commitment. There were no statistically significant differences between the two groups. Perhaps more revealing, there is no evidence that those hiring new teachers think so either. The percentage of non-NCATE applicants who found a teaching job was as high as among NCATE applicants. The jobs they received paid as well.

NCATE has accredited teacher education programs in some of the least selective institutions of higher education in the country. Thirty percent of the teachers who graduated from NCATE-approved programs attended colleges that were rated less than "competitive" in Barron's *Profiles of American Colleges*. Since the "competitive" category is not in fact very selective, one thing seems clear: Whatever the requirements for NCATE accreditation, rigorous admission standards are not among them. The academic ability of students graduating from a teacher education program plays virtually no role in determining whether the program will be accredited. While NCATE requires that a program use a test to screen applicants for admission, it does not specify the test to be used or the passing score.

Criteria for successful completion are even more vague, emphasizing process, not outcomes. For example, NCATE stipulates that "a candidate's mastery of a program's stated exit criteria or outcomes [be] assessed through the use of multiple sources of data such as a culminating experience, portfolios, interviews, videotaped and observed performance in schools, standardized tests, and course grades." This requires that program administrators use various means of assessment, not that graduates be held to any particular standard, since the exit criteria themselves are left up to the program or to state regulations.

Many schools and departments of education have shown by their decision to forgo NCATE accreditation that they do not believe this stamp of approval is of great value. Having failed a market test, NCATE and its champions are now pressuring state legislatures to require NCATE accreditation. The list of NCATE-accredited colleges suggests that politics are at least as important as educational quality in determining whether a school is accredited. Where governors have led, colleges have sought and obtained accreditation. Thus every college in North Carolina offering a teacher education program has obtained NCATE accreditation. In Arkansas, all but two have it. By contrast, New York has 103 state-accredited programs, but only three accredited by NCATE. Massachusetts has 61 state-accredited institutions of which only eight hold NCATE accreditation. All are non-selective institutions. The state's selective private schools, such as Harvard, Boston University, Brandeis, Smith, and Mt. Holyoke, are not NCATE accredited.

The problem with certification

The NCTAF's proposals would restrict the choices of both prospective teachers and school boards, as the licensing and accreditation standards it endorses would raise barriers to entry. For example, mandating NCATE accreditation could make it more difficult for talented undergraduates to become teachers should the cost of acquiring accreditation drive small liberal-arts colleges from the market. Programs that serve only a few students a year would be particularly vulnerable, leaving the supply of teachers to be dominated by large diploma mills.

The NCTAF endorses reforms that would require prospective teachers to take more courses, prolong their formal education, and devote more time to pre-service training in the form of induction programs and internships. This will have the greatest deterrent effect on those who place the greatest value on their time, including workers who are contemplating career changes. The practical experience and maturity of many of these individuals make them attractive candidates for teaching. Precisely for this reason, many states have adopted alternative certification routes that relax the standard requirements for certification, facilitating the entry of such persons into the profession. Yet the NCTAF, while nominally endorsing the concept of alternative certification, is generally opposed to programs that would reduce pre-service training. The NCTAF prefers that career changers spend a year or more in a postbaccalaureate program before they begin to teach.

Requiring more pre-service training would tend to screen out prospective teachers who have the interest and ability to pursue other careers, but who will find it hard to keep these options open while completing additional education courses. As a result, the applicant pool will be increasingly dominated by those who never thought of themselves as anything but teachers. Notice that this would have precisely the opposite effect of other policies that are intended to improve the quality of the teaching pool, for example, raising salaries. It is the very purpose of such policies to draw into education persons who are wavering between two careers. By contrast, increasing teacher-certification requirements discourages those who have attractive alternatives to teaching.

Teaching is not medicine

The NCTAF frequently resorts to argument by analogy, comparing teaching to medicine. The medical profession is largely self-regulated. Doctors put in years of training in medical school and residencies before achieving full professional standing. They must pass rigorous licensing examinations. Why should we expect less of teachers?

The case for licensing in medicine rests partly on the premise that consumers cannot make well-informed decisions concerning the quality of medical services. There is a complex body of specialized medical knowledge that medical consumers cannot be expected to know. The NCTAF continually draws comparisons to the "clinical" model in medicine and asserts that a similar body of specialized clinical knowledge exists in education. Let us see.

The following question on clinical practice was prepared by the National Board of Medical Examiners.

> A previously healthy 33-year old man has abdominal pain that he describes as steady with occasional cramping. His aunt, uncle, and cousins have had similar episodes. His abdomen is distended, and bowel sounds are decreased. Neurologic examination shows mild weakness in the upper arms. His urine is a faint reddish color. These findings suggest a defect in the biosynthetic pathway for
>
> A. collagen
> B. corticosteroid
> C. fatty acid
> D. heme
> E. thyroxine (T_4)

The next question is taken from the Praxis test for teachers developed by the Educational Testing Service—a test used by many states for teacher licensing.

> A third-grade student who is attempting to draw a spaceship stops drawing and asks the teacher to draw it. Of the following teacher responses, which would best provide for this student's continued learning and growth?
>
> A. Drawing the spaceship for him so that he can continue his picture
> B. Having the student observe models of spaceships and giving him some pointers about drawing
> C. Asking the best student artist to provide help
> D. Having another student draw the spaceship for him
> E. Assuring the student that the drawing is fine for his purpose

We suspect that few readers who are not medical professionals knew that the answer to the question on abdominal cramping was "E" or even understood the choices. By contrast, using common sense, virtually all readers were probably able to figure out the answer to the clinical teaching question (B). There is a body of expert knowledge informing clinical practice that doctors should know and that they can be tested on. The NCTAF has not established that anything like this exists in the field of pedagogy. Questions like the foregoing from the Praxis examination expose the pretensions of teacher professionalization.

Even if one supposed that teaching rests on a body of expert knowledge that consumers lack, the medical analogy breaks down for the further reason that parents do not purchase the services of teachers. School districts purchase these services for parents. Not only are principals and other school administrators trained professionals, they are also in a position to observe the teachers they hire directly, enjoying access to better information than any licensing agency. In fact, many teachers have previously taught at the schools that hire them as student teachers or as substitute teachers.

Of course, similar intermediaries stand between consumers and the medical professionals who treat them (though most consumers retain some choice of primary-care physicians). But this underscores another important difference between medicine and teaching. The NCTAF seeks legislation to require school districts to hire teachers who have completed NCTAF-approved training. In the field of medicine, however, it is the purchasers of medical services—hospitals, clinics, etc.—not the state, that have been the moving force behind the adoption of credentials for physicians. A state license is merely the beginning for most doctors. Nearly all practicing physicians and surgeons must also hold certification from one of the 24 national specialty boards. This has come about because the major actors—hospitals, insurance companies, and HMOs—have insisted that the doctors whom they hire or contract with be board certified.

A question of control

Enacting the NCTAF agenda would only serve to strengthen the position of the education establishment against parents and children in the making of public policy. Behind the NCTAF and NCATE are the National Education Association and the American Federation of Teachers, whose interest in restricting teacher supply is so obvious that it is astonishing that anyone would contemplate giving these organizations the right to determine who will be allowed to teach. Of the current 31-member NCATE executive board, seven are union appointed.

All examining teams sent to colleges include at least one teacher drawn from a pool of examiners selected by the NEA and AFT.

Unions also provide financial support for the professional organizations that would be empowered under the NCTAF proposals. The NEA's 1997-98 budget contains $366,600 for NCATE. The same budget contains $306,550 to support the certification through the National Board of Professional Teaching Standards and $213,765 to support efforts "to make licensure ... a process controlled by the profession."

For all the discussion of higher standards and improved training, the NCTAF's recommendations are fundamentally about control. The NCTAF would turn over the accreditation of teacher preparation programs to NCATE. Licensing examinations would be prepared by the Interstate New Teacher Assessment and Support Consortium (INTASC), another private professional organization. The National Board for Professional Teaching Standards would decide who qualifies as a master teacher. Overseeing and guiding all of this activity would be independent professional boards whose members would be drawn not from the public's elected representatives but professional education organizations.

It is naive to think that the impact of these changes would be limited to improving the training teachers receive (if it would even accomplish that). Prominent members of the commission and organizations aligned with the NCTAF have a vested interest in opposing charter schools and other forms of school choice, as well as alternative certification programs that bypass traditional teacher training. The prospects for such reforms will be much bleaker if power is taken from elected officials who are increasingly responsive to the public's demand for genuine accountability.

Education Week, June 10, 1998

Some Unanswered Questions Concerning National Board Certification of Teachers

By Dale Ballou and Michael Podgursky

How well will the board discriminate when thousands of applicants seek certification through a bureaucraticized system? No one knows. The National Board for Professional Teaching Standards is a private organization that attempts to recognize teacher excellence by bestowing a "national board certificate" on worthy applicants. Teachers seeking this recognition submit portfolios for evaluation to the board (located just outside Detroit). The portfolios include videotapes of their teaching, lesson plans, and samples of student work. These materials are reviewed by "experts"--apparently, moon- lighting teachers trained by the board. Teachers are also required to take a test at a regional site.

Thanks to vigorous promotion by the National Commission on Teaching & America's Future, national board certification has gained considerable support in Washington and in many states. The commission has called for 105,000 board-certified teachers over the next decade. The Clinton administration has given this proposal its full support, and Congress has been generous as well. The fiscal 1998 budget gives the NBPTS $18 million, bringing the total direct federal support to $49 million since 1991. States have been urged to cover the $2,000 application fees, provide financial incentives for board certification, and furnish other support. In addition, major foundations have contributed over $10 million to the board.

While the resources and influence of the National Board for Professional Teaching Standards are expanding rapidly, many policy questions remain unanswered.

- Is the national board able to identify superior teachers? The surprising answer to this question is: We don't know. Although the board has spent considerable time and money developing standards for accomplished teaching, many of these standards are vague platitudes ("Accomplished teachers create a caring, inclusive, and challenging environment in which students actively learn"). The board has also developed exercises and performance assessments, along with ways of scoring them, to determine how well applicants have met its standards for an accomplished teacher. Given the vagueness of the standards and the subjective element that enters any performance assessment, one would expect that the board would have done extensive research to show a correlation between its assessments and more objective measures of teacher performance (for example, student test scores). In fact, the board has never provided any evidence of this kind to validate its certification procedures. Neither has the commission. Our own search of the literature has uncovered no such evidence.

The board defends its procedures by pointing to dozens of "validity" studies it has conducted for its standards and assessments. However, these studies are based entirely on the opinions of panels of educators as to what an accomplished teacher should know and do, not on objective measures of student performance. At no point has it ever been ascertained that the students of teachers who meet board standards actually learn more.

The lack of hard evidence on this point was recently acknowledged when the U.S. Department of Education awarded $23 million to the University of Maryland and 25 "partner" organizations to form the National Partnership for Excellence and Accountability in Teaching. One of the first projects of this consortium will be to determine "whether teachers who have been certified as outstanding by the National Board for Professional Teaching Standards produce better-educated students" ("Ed. Dept. Funds Large-Scale Research Effort on Teaching," Oct. 29, 1997.)

But the objectivity of this investigation is badly compromised. Incredibly, the national board itself belongs to the NPEAT consortium, as does the National Commission on Teaching & America's Future and other organizations allied with it. Moreover, the research proposal leaves no doubt that the findings will be favorable to the board, since the proposal elsewhere stipulates that NPEAT is to investigate the training, mentoring, or other professional-development activities of board-certified teachers, in order to disseminate to the broader education community information on these correlates of "success." In short, not only has there been no research establishing the superiority of board-certified teachers by objective measures, there is no reason to expect credible evidence on this point from "research" currently funded by the federal government.

It is also important to distinguish questions about the validity of the assessment instrument from questions about the quality of the teachers applying for board certification. It is also important to distinguish questions about the validity of the assessment instrument from questions about the quality of the teachers applying for board certification. It is not enough to show that board-certified teachers are better than average teachers, for this might merely be due to a superior applicant pool. In fact, this is only too likely to be the case. The 914 teachers who currently hold national board certification are probably above average, due in part to teacher self-selection, and in part to the fact that school districts are nominating their best teachers for the process. Hence the mere fact that board-certified teachers are better than average would not establish that the board is able to identify better teachers. The latter is the critical question, of course, particularly if the applicant pool changes character later, when tens of thousands have been certified.

Why would we expect a difference between early and later applicants? The answer is simple: money. In North Carolina, the state salary schedule for national-board-certified teachers is 12 percent higher. Consider the case of a teacher with a master's degree and 10 years of experience earning $29,960--the state-mandated minimum salary (no local supplement). The discounted present value of this bonus for the 10-year life of a national board certificate is roughly $33,000. With renewal every 10 years for the remainder of her 30 years of teaching, the present value rises to slightly more than $84,000. These totals do not include pension or other benefits tied to salary.

Thus, if costs of applying are low and there is a modest probability of success, many less-than-outstanding teachers are going to seek out national board certification. It is all but inevitable that the unions will insist on influencing, and eventually settling through collective bargaining, eligibility for subsidies to defray the $2,000 application fee. As a result, the process by which teachers are nominated for board certification is apt to become routinized and standardized. How well will the board discriminate when thousands of applicants seek certification through a bureaucratized system? No one knows.

- Is national board certification a cost-efficient way to identify superior teachers? Even if it can be shown that the national board identifies better teachers, this falls short of demonstrating that board certification is the best way to spend education dollars. As noted above, by the end of fiscal 1998, the board will have received approximately $49 million in federal funds and certified roughly 1,000 teachers--that is, $49,000 per teacher. This takes no account of the opportunity cost of the many hours a teacher spends preparing portfolios, writing essays, and so forth (for which some states and districts provide paid time off), or the many millions of dollars in foundation contributions.

There are likely more cost-effective ways to identify superior teachers. The national board bypasses the most obvious source of information on teacher performance: local administrators and parents. A simple alternative might be to solicit letters or to poll supervisors, colleagues, and parents--individuals who are in a position to observe performance directly.

There are likely more cost-effective ways to identify superior teachers. Indeed, this very point is tacitly conceded by the board itself. In order to assemble panels of "accomplished" teachers to conduct its validity tests, the board approaches a random sample of district administrators to nominate such teachers. This raises an interesting question. If a randomly chosen school administrator can be relied upon to nominate an accomplished teacher for the national board panels, then what need is there for a national board to develop and implement a much more expensive process for identifying accomplished teachers? If the procedure the board follows for assembling its panels is reasonable, there are apparently no grounds for establishing the board in the first place.

- Is national board certification a good substitute for merit pay? There is also some uncertainty about the practical results of the board's activities. The NBPTS does not claim to make good teachers, only to identify those who are already superior. Policymakers need to ask in what way the public benefits.

It has been suggested that board certification furnishes a substitute for merit pay--a basis for awarding additional compensation that is superior to alternative mechanisms (supervisor observations, peer review, and so on). The National Commission on Teaching & America's Future asserts as much, but presents no evidence on the matter. Teachers' unions vigorously oppose merit pay and support national board certification, but this alone does not settle the matter, since it may reflect the unions' perception that it will be easier for large numbers of teachers to qualify for awards through board certification than through traditional merit pay.

This issue aside, the question remains whether national board certification is a cost-efficient substitute for merit pay. Merit pay is far less expensive to administer and relies on performance assessments from supervisors who are in daily contact with the teacher (as well as the parent-consumers). In addition, it is an annual process, whereas national board certification occurs once every decade (the procedure for recertification has not yet been established). The fact that a teacher was superior five years ago may not tell us a great deal about performance now or five years in the future.

- Can the board control cheating? National board certification relies heavily on portfolios of student work, essays by applicants, and videotapes of classroom performance, all supplied by the teacher. The board makes no attempt to determine the authenticity of these materials. With substantial sums of money at stake, there will inevitably be cheating. Some of it will be subtle: fudging an account of the feedback provided students, altering a description of lesson objectives after the fact so that the observed outcome accords with the stated intention. In other cases, cheating may be egregious. Student work may be fabricated or altered and teacher essays plagiarized. In fact, the World Wide Web site maintained by the board encourages applicants to contact certified teachers for "support, information, and advice" and provides e-mail addresses, a circumstance that will encourage collaborative effort, some of which is apt to cross the ethical line. The board has not explained how it can maintain the integrity of the process when the opportunities to cheat are so pervasive and the returns to cheating are substantial.

In spite of the fact that very basic questions concerning the value of national board certification remain unanswered, Congress and state governments are being asked to invest over $100 million in the next several years to meet a goal of 105,000 certified teachers. Until convincing data are presented to address these questions, further substantial investments of public funds are unwarranted.

Philadelphia Inquirer, May 30, 1998

Squeezing the Lemons of Teaching

by Chris Satullo

When you first heard the idea, it struck you as wacky, a gimmick. But it took on a stubborn, puckish appeal.

"Teacher choice, eh?" one side of your brain thought. "It just might help."

But the other side fired back: "Teacher choice? Gimme a break! That scheme has more holes in it than the Eagles' offensive line."

What is teacher choice?

It is a school-reform notion being peddled to anyone who will listen by Robert Strauss, a professor at Carnegie Mellon University who has researched teacher training.

Unlike charter schools or vouchers, Strauss claims, teacher choice would not cost anything and would require no changes in state law or teacher contracts. It could be tried tomorrow by any school district with the gumption to do so.

Here's the idea: Let parents pick their children's teachers.

How? Parents would rank their top three choices for the following year's classes. If too many listed the same teacher as top choice, a lottery would be held.

What if some teacher gets few or no sign-ups? Good. Strauss chuckles: "The beauty of this idea is that it serves to identify the lemons. Every organization has them. Schools are among the worst."

What happens to lemons? They wouldn't teach, Strauss says. Divide students among the teachers whom parents actually want to see in a classroom. If that means the most-admired teachers get a few more students, don't sweat it. Pay the lemons their contracted salaries to do other work or to twiddle their thumbs in the faculty lounge.

Wouldn't that rile taxpayers -- and other teachers? Strauss is counting on it: howls of exasperation at unions and administrators who have hidden behind the skirts of tenure to elude accountability for bad teachers. Choice would plop a dunce cap onto poor performers, which he hopes would ratchet up pressure to deal with them.

But often, the best teachers aren't the easiest or most popular ones. Yes, Strauss says, and that's why teacher choice works only in conjunction with "high-stakes" testing -- in which the student's ability to progress toward a diploma depends on mastering the material. With such stakes, Strauss predicts, parents would not long indulge their children's fancy for easy graders. Tests should be in the fall and spring, he says, with publication of average results by classroom.

But parents aren't qualified to know which teachers are the best. "Parents are often undersold," Strauss maintains. "There's a lot of paternalism, particularly about poor black parents . . . And don't underestimate the amount of teacher shopping that already goes on."

You know he's right about that. You've been to suburban dinner parties in which teacher scouting reports absorb half the evening. Give parents the power to choose teachers, and many will take it seriously. For those who don't, schools would assign teachers -- i.e. the status quo.

And if you created a market in teachers, someone would soon publish (for service or profit) faculty ratings at least as reliable as those guides to America's colleges.

Aren't crowded classes an odd way to reward the best teachers? How better, Strauss asks, to motivate them to nudge colleagues to improve? But, yes, he concedes, you'd eventually need merit pay.

"There would be a lot of commotion," he chirps, "but not a lot of downside risk."

You're not so sure. How long would top-notch teachers tolerate having 27 students while a mediocrity down the hall had 15?

But, as a parent who has watched creative teachers ground down by Type A, hooked-on-phonics parents projecting their career crises onto second grade, you can see an upside to how a market in teachers would sort students. Such parents could gravitate to the desks-in-a-row types, leaving more-adventurous educators freer to innovate.

Wouldn't high-stakes testing induce teachers to "teach to the test?" If it's a good test, there are worse fates, Strauss replies. Only mediocre teachers would panic; good teachers would do what they do and thrive.

These are only a few of the qualms you throw at Strauss. But, in the end, you are as frustrated as he is with the stale schools debate, in which each side keeps ducking awkward facts. You can't rule out that his notion might do more good than harm. You've talked it over with some people whose views you respect. You'd like to hear from more.

So here's the question, what do you think?

Dayton Daily News, **May 28, 1998**

There Are No Secrets In Schools

by Ellen Belcher

After five days as a substitute teacher, I'm hardly an expert. Rather, I was a `temporary' teacher - the name Ohio gives to substitutes who don't have an education degree - in the truest sense. But looking back, certain things strike me as a journalist, nonteacher and parent that might not be obvious if you don't get the chance to be in classrooms.

* There is something special about a good school. No one has to sell you on the staff or students. You feel the warmth when you walk through the door. You see it in the way people talk to each other, how they smile at strangers, and especially in how the students relate to the adults. There are no secrets in schools. The students know who works hard, who cares about them and who's just going through the motions.

You don't even have to ask them. I had students tell me they never do much in this or that class, and I had others who would have worked even if there hadn't been an adult in the room. The teacher was there, if only in spirit, commanding, `Do your work. I will know if you don't.'

* I was amazed at how desperate some schools are for subs. If a school is short a substitute, principals and secretaries can kill big chunks of their day piecing together a plan to make sure someone's in charge of the teacherless classroom every minute. Some principals cultivate certain substitutes in the hope that they'll work only in their schools, and they're unabashed about their possessiveness. You do what you have to for your students and to keep your school running.

* I had imagined before substituting that working in an elementary school would be the easiest assignment. It's much more exhausting than it looks, and, for me, high school and even middle school were not nearly as physically demanding. (Do not ask about the sweat I expended, though, trying to recall geometry principles.) And, as a sub, I didn't have to go home and grade papers or plan for the next day.

One elementary teacher said the trick to succeeding in the primary grades is to have more energy than the students. Like most good advice, recognizing its value and living it are two different things.

* I think middle-school teachers are masochistic saints. Everything that's good and bad about children seems magnified in those early teen-age years. The students are full of energy, but channeling it is like capturing lightning. They're capable of sustained conversation, but they can go on forever. They look like little adults, but they don't have to struggle to act like babies. I had a hard time figuring out what was reasonable to expect from them.

Don't they know better than to habitually poke at each other, or are they just being sixth-graders? Did everybody really need to sharpen their pencils, or is it inevitable that they can't get from one class to the next without breaking the lead?

* Lots of people have asked if teachers and principals knew I was a journalist. I believe they did not. I asked both the Dayton and the Bellbrook school superintendents to be put on their sub lists, but we agreed that I'd choose the teaching assignments, and I'd get no special treatment.

When I had a conversation of any length with a teacher or administrator at a school, I disclosed that I work for the paper and was writing about the experience. With one exception, they said they thought it was a realistic way to understand a substitute's job. On two occasions, I was asked to come back to sub again, and both individuals were surprised to learn I was a reporter. One principal didn't know about my assignment until I called him with follow-up questions several days after I had been at his school.

* It didn't take five days to feel how seductive teaching can be. There's something indescribably pleasurable about having two dozen children at your feet, lapping up what you're telling them, waving their arms in the air, aching to tell you what they think or know. There were plenty of those moments in the elementary class I taught, and the middle school students really were anxious for me to know they could rattle off a goodly number of states bordering the Atlantic Ocean.

I doubt any of the high school students had any intellectual epiphanies because of anything I said, but I can imagine that there's something thrilling about getting 30 students to see the predictable magic of chipping away at both sides of an equation until all you're left with is `x' equals something.

And being thanked by a child as opposed to an adult feels different. You expect your adult boss to say `good job' when you've gone out of your way; he's being polite, he wants you to do it all again tomorrow. But teachers don't expect gratitude from their students. And when a child surprises them, for many, it's enough to keep them going for another week or month or year.

The New Republic, May 25, 1998

Merger mania hits the teachers' unions.

DIVIDED THEY STAND

By Peter Schrag

The late Al Shanker, who was the president of the American Federation of Teachers from 1974 until his death last year, probably was the nearest thing to a statesman that white-collar unionism ever had. In part, the success of that statesmanship rested on the hope of creating a single union of teachers and allied professionals—meaning a merger between his AFT, which now has 950,000 members, most of them in the nation's big urban districts, and the much larger National Education Association, which has its 2.3 million.

At a time when public education was increasingly being challenged by voucher proposals and by private providers of everything from tutoring to complete school programs, Shanker sought to reshape the profession into a major force for higher academic standards and other reforms. And there was no way to do that as long as local affiliates of the two unions were competing for members by promising nothing but fatter contracts and more inflexible job guarantees—and then waging unending war on school systems in the effort to get them.

Now that the leaders of the two organizations have publicly declared their intention to merge, the dream of a single union is about to meet its supreme test. If the merger is approved by the delegates at their respective union conventions this July, the new, still-unnamed merged entity (for now it's being called the United Organization) could have a major impact both on the nation's schools and on the broader fortunes of the American labor movement.

The new organization would, among other things, be the largest single union within the AFL-CIO, larger than the often corrupt and embarrassing Teamsters. As an organization of white-collar professionals, most of them middle-class women, it could do much to polish the faded image of organized labor. And, although the two teacher organizations rarely disagree on national education issues even now, the new entity would bring a single voice to bear on these debates. Most particularly, if the hopes of its proponents are realized, the new union would assume a major role in turning around underperforming schools, upgrading the skills of the profession, and leading all of education to higher standards.

But the new entity could also easily lose as much in brains and energy as it gains in bulk. It could become an even bigger and less accountable obstacle to reform than many state and local affiliates often already are. It could, as its many conservative critics claim, act like just another monopoly.

Of course, for the moment, the biggest question is whether the merger will happen at all. There are good and ample reasons for the merger, not least of them the growing agreement between the presidents of both organizations—Bob Chase at the NEA, Sandra Feldman at the AFT—that public education is in trouble. Without what Chase calls "the new unionism"—a movement broadly concerned with improving schools and not just bread-and-butter issues—the whole enterprise of public education could eventually be torn apart by a restive public that often sees the schools as arrogant, unresponsive bureaucracies.

But teacher unionism has always been an uncomfortable fit, producing no end of ambivalence among the rank and file, particularly among members of the older and sometimes sclerotic NEA. Are teachers just another collection of blue-collar working stiffs, like steel workers or auto workers or coal miners? Or are they professionals whose responsibilities transcend the limitations of negotiated hours, working conditions, and seniority rules? That is, are they not properly subject to collective bargaining, rigid salary structures, grievance procedures, and so on?

And, if they insist on the prerogatives and status of professionals, can they also behave like assembly-line

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unionists—hitting the bricks and trying to shut down the enterprise, even as they claim to have only the children's interests at heart? It was only last year that the NEA accepted the principle of peer review, meaning the participation of teachers in evaluating, mentoring, and, if necessary, disciplining other teachers. Until then, the union had always regarded peer review as a threat to rank-and-file solidarity. "We're a hybrid," said one NEA official in the Midwest. "Our members want to be a union when they want to be a union. They want to be professionals when they want to be professionals."

That sort of ambivalence—combined with the misgivings that tens of thousands of NEA members, particularly those in the South and Midwest, have about belonging to anything even remotely connected with the AFL-CIO—leaves the fate of the merger in considerable doubt. Most NEA officials acknowledge that, as one of them said, "if the vote were taken today, we couldn't get the [two-thirds majority] we need" to have it approved at the union's convention in July. In a straw poll taken at the Illinois Education Association convention in March, 75 percent of the 1,000 delegates voted against the merger. There appears to be equally strong opposition in Iowa, New Jersey, and several other states.

Both organizations are divided. Shanker, who died last year, was probably more influential outside his union than inside it. A proponent of world-class standards, national testing, and upgraded teaching skills, he was a man who could—and did—make common cause with education reformers across a broad political spectrum and who, in the last years of his career, probably had more stature than any of them. At the same time, many of the members of his locals in New York, Chicago, Philadelphia, Cleveland, and other large cities—school people who had first learned their militant unionism from him—remained stuck in the confrontational model of schoolhouse labor relations.

For its part, the NEA is even more deeply split—among people mired in what remains of its traditionally friendly, rural schoolmarm ethos of school management, those who ambivalently want to be both union members and professionals, and those who are with Chase in the search for that new unionism. Worse, the inertia generated by the ambivalence in the NEA is exacerbated by other imponderables, particularly the fact that the NEA, in the words of one friendly critic, "has gone absolutely wacko with political correctness." The organization has rigid ethnic quotas throughout its governance and management structure. Rules require a minimum of 20 percent minority representation on each committee, as well as on the board of directors and the executive committee, and an effort to achieve ethnic proportionality in all staff positions—all of which produces an endemic unwillingness to take on tough issues.

For example, at one recent joint meeting, AFT members raised tough questions about failing inner-city schools. As one participant described the reaction, "the NEA staffers came away shaking their heads that such issues should be raised at all. They don't even like talking about those things because they're afraid someone will be offended." In the last national AFT conventions over which he presided, Shanker also often warned his cheering members about going overboard in the attempt to include all handicapped children—even those who are dangerous and disruptive—in mainstream classrooms. The NEA has ducked the issue. Meanwhile, in order not to offend its activists, the NEA takes positions on scores of issues that bear only the vaguest relationship to the central mission of the schools—from endorsement of the "accurate portrayal" of the roles and contributions of gays and lesbians "throughout history," to statehood for the District of Columbia, to the need for a single-payer health care system. The NEA even supported a boycott of Florida orange juice after Anita Bryant, at the time a chief spokesperson for the industry, made some remarks that were deemed homophobic.

The proposed governance structure for the new entity does not impose numerical quotas, although it promises that the union will remain committed "to maintain—and expand—current AFT and NEA levels of minority representation throughout leadership, governing [sic] and staff." There is also a promise for "the expansion of all governing bodies [to] help ensure adequate minority representation."

AFT officers who helped negotiate the outlines of the merger say privately that the new governance structure more closely resembles the AFT's somewhat more streamlined and centralized arrangement than the NEA's many-layered hyperdemocratic system. But that hardly guarantees smooth sailing. The existing NEA staff, which, at least until recently, had been far more influential in the organization than its elected officers, has an enormous investment in the status quo. So do the thousands of college professors, especially in the nation's hidebound education schools, who are influential NEA members. Will they embrace an organization that would be committed to major restructuring and changes of attitudes in teacher training programs?

A lot remains to be worked out. If both unions approve the merger this summer, the new entity probably won't come into existence until 2002, and, even after that, state and local affiliates, while they would be members of the United Organization, would not be required to merge. Nor, in recognition of the anti-union sentiment within the NEA, would individual members be required to join the AFL-CIO. Consequently, an organization with a potential AFL-CIO membership of 3.2 million is only guaranteeing the federation 1.4 million members—a figure calculated to be just large enough to exceed the Teamsters and thus, it is hoped, to overshadow it in public visibility. The difference—equal to roughly 82 percent of the NEA's current membership—is itself a measure of the uncertainties of the new unionism. And, as education consultant Julia Koppich says, "a lot of rank-and-file NEA members just don't believe public education is in much danger."

Against all that, Chase, who really seems to be serious about changing his organization and sees the merger as the best—perhaps the only—way to do it, is running from state to state to persuade the rank and file that there's a different world out there. The task is made easier by Feldman, who is less intimidating and generally regarded as more personable than Shanker was.

But the cultures of the two organizations remain vastly different. Chase was clearly influenced by Shanker, who long ago became bored with the bread-and-butter teacher unionism he himself developed in the late 1960s and 1970s. But Chase's version still has a softer edge to it than Shanker's or Feldman's: a little less hard-nosed reform substance about teacher training and low-performing schools, a bit more feel-good process talk about collaborative nonadversarial work with school boards "to resolve problems" and to "give members more say in how schools are run." This merger, he said, is "like blending two households." It's hardly an image anybody in the AFT would ever use.

It's also something that faintly echoes the pre-union, small-town sensibility of the old NEA, whose affiliates exercised a lot of clout in state legislatures, but whose notion of collective action was to "meet and confer" with management, not anything resembling collective bargaining, much less going out on strike. That echo is hardly the wave of the future. It's clear that Chase, like much of the NEA, remains uncomfortable with the AFT's brasher, more aggressive reform rhetoric. More broadly, his organization, which learned many of its union tactics from Shanker and learned at least to talk the new unionism from Shanker as well, is still slower, more cautious, and far more bureaucratic. Shanker was routinely reelected every two years. The NEA now limits its presidents to three four-year terms, which, of course, is one reason why the NEA's well-paid bureaucrats are so much more powerful.

There is a story, which may be apocryphal, about the dancer Isadora Duncan proposing marriage to George Bernard Shaw. With her body and his brains, she is supposed to have said, they could produce perfect children. Shaw supposedly replied: "But what if they have my body and your brains?" The story is not entirely apt. The new organization, if it happens, will certainly have the NEA's bulk. But so far there is no assurance that it will have anything like Shanker's smarts, vision, and political savvy. •

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Selected Readings on School Reform

Curriculum & Pedagogy

This summer's inspection of content and teaching begins with Richard Bernstein's brilliant "Dictatorship of Virtue: Multiculturalism in Elementary and Secondary Schools" from *American Experiment Quarterly*. If you haven't already read Bernstein's book of the same title, have a look at this perceptive expose of multiculturalism as an intolerant political agenda. Bernstein's main beef is that the multiculturalist curriculum is most harmful to the people it intends to help.

Nowhere is the multicultural agenda more visible than in the history curriculum. In this spring's edition of *Selected Readings*, we introduced you to the problems encountered in the development of the national history standards. This time, Sol Stern's "The Rebirth of American History" from *City Journal* brings us good news. With a best-selling series of "unabashedly patriotic" textbooks (Joy Hakim's *A History of US*) and the institution of rigorous history standards in several states, such as Virginia, Stern ponders the renaissance of history.

Next up is a transcript of E.D. Hirsch's speech at the Seventh Annual Core Knowledge National Conference. We find the speech, titled "Why General Knowledge Should be a Goal of Education in a Democracy," very convincing. By now, you are likely acquainted with Hirsch's "Core Knowledge" curriculum and his explanation of why general knowledge is essential, but what impresses us most is the solid research foundation on which this approach rests.

We conclude with a pair of articles targeting modern pedagogical fads and fallacies by Matthew Robinson, a writer for *Investor's Business Daily*. Robinson asks two straightforward questions: "Are Schools Too Hard on Kids?" and "Does Good Practice Make Perfect?" Many educators seem to fear that tough standards will crush kids' self-esteem and they abhor "mere memorization of facts." Yet the research evidence seems to suggest that these "old-fashioned" methods still work today—when given the chance.

BRW

***American Experiment Quarterly*, Summer 1998**

Dictatorship of Virtue: Multiculturalism in Elementary and Secondary Schools

Richard Bernstein

Journalist Richard Bernstein is a book critic for the New York Times, *where he has also been United Nations correspondent and national cultural correspondent. Two of his four books are about China; he opened* Time *magazine's first Beijing bureau in 1980.*

In his book Dictatorship of Virtue: Multiculturalism and the Battle for America's Future *(1994), Bernstein wrote, "Scratch the surface of a multiculturalist curriculum, and there is this worm gnawing away at any notion of American goodness. What emerges is the passion play of victims and oppressors, colonizers and colonized."* A Boston Globe *reviewer called the book "tart, sometimes eloquent, always graceful and lucid." Bernstein spoke to a Center of the American audience on this subject in October 1997.*

One of the frustrations of the topic of multiculturalism and the assault on the concept of an American identity is that it takes such a multitude of forms that it is difficult to keep track of it all. Multiculturalism and its closely allied phenomenon of political correctness show up mostly in small ways, in a statement here, a program there. It is not a centralized movement with a head office and an official newsletter. It is, in short, difficult to keep track of and difficult to define with precision. And when we do define it, we tend to focus attention on certain outrageous episodes that happen to catch the media's attention—like some excess of gender-neutral language, or the book *Politically Correct Bedtime Stories*, or an outrageous sexual harassment charge: a six-year-old boy, for example, accused of harassment for kissing a six-year-old girl on the cheek.

But most often the examples are too small to make it into the newspapers, even though it is this nonspectacular, normative sort of PCness that, in my view, is the real PCness. Let me give you an example, an illustration of the way in which the PC sensibility has become so pervasive as to have become normal, almost unnoticed.

I was in Barnes and Noble, where I had occasion to leaf through a large, reference-sized volume called *Masterpieces of World Literature* published by HarperCollins. It provided short, readable, quite high quality articles on perhaps a couple hundred acknowledged literary masterpieces. I was doing a review for the *New York Times* on a novel that that was based on the Oedipus plays by the immortal Sophocles, and I needed a kind of Cliffs Notes fix to remind me of some of the characters' names and their roles. I was reminded, reading the synopsis and the explanatory articles on *Oedipus the King* and *Oedipus at Colonus*, of how staggeringly great the Sophocles plays are and why they have stood the test of time. For me the essential element of those plays was Oedipus's amazing integrity, his courage in accepting the consequences for what was—true—a flaw in his character, but what was also an unmerited tragic fate. I hadn't read or seen or even thought about the Oedipus plays for many years, and so, reading the articles in *Masterpieces of World Literature*, I found myself once again inspired by Sophocles' great vision. This was a writer who dared to imagine the unimaginable and, in so doing, created two works of staggering strangeness, moral illumination, and poetic grandeur.

The other works in *Masterpieces of World Literature* had much the same ring. I won't list all of the books that are included, but I did note down the first work for each letter of the alphabet, beginning with *Absalom, Absalom!* by William Faulkner and ending with *Waiting for Godot* by Samuel Beckett, with such works as Voltaire's *Candide*, Dickens's *David Copperfield*, Steinbeck's *East of Eden*, and Rabelais's *Gargantua and Pantagruel* in between, along with *Hamlet*, *The Iliad*, *Das Kapital*, Sappho's "Ode to Aphrodite," *Paradise Lost*, the *Ramayana*, *The Tale of Genji*, *The Trial* by Franz Kafka, and *Ulysses* by James Joyce. A good list for lovers of literature.

Then I noticed that there was a whole set of these *Masterpieces* books, and it was the others in the series that bring me to my point. The other volumes were *Masterpieces of Women's Literature*, *Masterpieces of African-American Literature*, and *Masterpieces of Latino Literature*. I breezed through these other volumes and found what I expected to find. Let me give you a sense of it by going over the list—first work for each letter of the alphabet—for the *Masterpieces of Women's Literature*. There was, first, *Adam Bede* by George Eliot, a book that happens also to be in the *Masterpieces of World Literature* list. The first book under *B* was *Backlash* by Susan Faludi. This book, published in 1991, is a lengthy argument by a journalist for the *Wall Street Journal* to the effect that men were finding ways to rob women of the progress made by the women's movement. You can agree or disagree with Faludi's argument, but even if you agree, would you place her book, not yet a decade old, into the "masterpiece" category? Would you call it "literature"?

I happen to know Susan Faludi, and I like her, even if we don't always see eye to eye. I think she would probably agree that putting *Backlash* on a list of literary masterpieces is a bit of a stretch.

It gets worse—or, at least, it does not get better. Next on the women's list is a work called *Calm Down Mother*, a one-act play by Megan Terry. The women's book in its summary categorizes each work according to what it calls "type of plot," and *Calm Down Mother*'s type of plot is "feminist." I had not realized that the word *feminist* could be used to describe a type of plot. I wonder: Is there a type of plot that is black? Another that is white? Christian? Jewish? Are there Republican plot types and Democratic ones, conservative and liberal? I suspect that an "antifeminist" plot might have a hard time making it onto the masterpieces of women's literature list.

To continue, though I promise not for too much longer. The next work, the first book listed under *D*: *A Diary from Dixie* by Mary Boykin Chesnut. This book is a Civil War diary that "reveals a keen awareness of the oppression to which women—black and white, slave or free—were subjected during that period." Chesnut, the description of her book continues, was "fond of her husband" (I like that expression, "fond of her husband," which stands in stark contrast to the possibility that Chesnut actually loved her husband), but she saw all women, rich and poor, as "slaves to men."

And so we find another illustration of another characteristic of multiculturalism, and we are only up to the letter *D*. It is what I call the equality of suffering syndrome, and the main idea is that all people who are not white and male have been equally victimized by that vale of tears that is patriarchal history. Mary Chesnut may or may not have actually believed in the antebellum American South that slave women and free women were equal sufferers. If she did believe that, then she was a very foolish woman and her works would almost by definition have to be excluded from any list of "masterpieces." In any case, the little blurb about her illustrates another element in the multiculturalist picture, which is its careful, assiduous, reverential cultivation of the cult of victimhood, by which women, gays and lesbians, Hispanics, Asians, disabled people, and various others are assumed to be just as disadvantaged as blacks were in American history.

Just for your information, some of the other works that are listed are *Fear of Flying* by Erica Jong, *The Female Eunuch* by Germaine Greer, *The Feminine Mystique* by Betty Friedan, *Against Our Will* by Susan Brownmiller, and *Intercourse* by Andrea Dworkin, this last book described as one in which the author "attributes women's societal subordination to their becoming a colonized people through the act which intimately connects them to their oppressors—sexual intercourse."

Politics and Power Grabs

What does the example of *Masterpieces of Women's Literature* tell us about the multiculturalist world that we inhabit? Or, to put this question a different way: What is the connection between the book in Barnes and Noble and an issue that has arisen lately in Minnesota, the issue of the Department of Education's newly published Rules for Educational Diversity? I think there are two connections, two ways in which the ideology behind the book and the ideology behind the rules manifest the same misconceived tendencies.

First, they both show that material is being chosen not because of its intrinsic merit, but because of the requirements of group politics. Secondary works are elevated to the status of "masterpiece" by political decree, in the same way that educational requirements are altered to try to bring about an arithmetic equality of results among every group in the society. Second, they both show the way in which what is presented as a literary or educational program is really a political program, or even a grab for power. *Masterpieces of Women's Literature*, with its inclusion of every feminist tract ever written and its choice of secondary works showing the supposed oppression of women, poses as a literary endeavor; actually, it is pure politics, a politics that pushes us to redefine literary standards—or, what is more common, to eliminate them altogether on the grounds that they are, as Catharine MacKinnon has said, just the things that white males value about themselves anyway. A similar statement can be made about the Rules for Educational Diversity; it is a political program—an effort to purvey a particular, rather left-wing way of looking at the world—that preempts opposition by portraying itself as a way of making educational advances for disadvantaged students.

I happen to have some background information about the situation in Minnesota that might shed some light on what these rules would actually do to the schools if they were adopted. Some years ago, when I was doing research for my book, I was looking for a school that had adopted multiculturalism as its official philosophy. I wanted to visit it, interview teachers and administrators, see classrooms and curriculum materials, and get a sense of what the multiculturalist system of education of the future would look like. I chose the Hans Christian Andersen School of Many Voices in Minneapolis. It was here that I first encountered that not-very-euphonious phrase MCGFDA *pedagogy*, which reappeared in the diversity rules proposed for the entire state. MCGFDA stands for multicultural, gender fair, disability aware. What is it?

Let me be clear about one thing. I spent two days at the Hans Christian Andersen School of Many Voices, and I was impressed with the spirit of the enterprise, the liveliness and attractiveness of the place itself, the dedication of the teachers, their obvious energy and commitment. Like Will Rogers, I didn't meet anybody I didn't like. They clearly believed that they were doing what was best for children, especially the black, Hispanic, and Native American children who made up about three-quarters of the school's population.

But when I looked at the curriculum, at the message conveyed to the pupils there, I did not have a favorable impression. The school was a realm for the practice of the victim cult, with white males set up as the victimizers of all of the nonwhite peoples, who represented the good. The underlying message of the place (actually, it wasn't all that underlying: it was pretty overt) was that we are all different rather than all the same and that we have to stress that difference, to identify with it in almost everything we do.

The most conspicuous part of the school—aside from the banner with the fabled initials MCGFDA on it—was the veritable cult of difference that existed there, the power of the pressure on pupils to think of themselves as members of small groups whose character and identities stemmed from that association. I attended a poetry-reading class for one of the lower elementary grades (the school went from kindergarten to fifth grade). As each poem was recited, the teacher would ask the students to identify its ethnic origins. And so after the poem, the children would shout out "Langston Hughes—African American." They sang in unison "European American" after the name of another poet, "American Indian–Zuni" after a third, "Asian-Chinese" for yet another. The feeling pervaded the school that recognizing the diversity of American life was not just a goal created in the service of tolerance, but that it was the ultimate objective of the entire educational experience, the single-issue campaign to be waged through the six years that children would spend there. A banner displayed in the school saying "I Learn Through Diversity" summed up this idea. But that seemed to me an empty slogan, a phrase utterly without real meaning. How does one learn through diversity? Does it help with addition? Can you master a foreign language with it? Does it teach correct English usage? Could there be another banner reading "I Learn Through Homogeneity?"

On a bulletin board, I saw a display of essays in which the children expressed their ideas on making the world a better place. At the bottom of each little essay, the pupils had written their names and their ethnic identity, along the lines of "My name is John Smith and my culture is European American" or "My name is Elisa Jones and my culture is African American." There was, in other words, no American culture, no common culture at the school. There were just separate cultures, which, upon further scrutiny, were actually divided into two cultures: the hegemonic white male culture and all the oppressed cultures.

My impression of a left-wing and highly politicized curriculum was intensified when I asked several social studies teachers what they actually taught. Their answers suggested that the notion of victims and victimizers was an organizing principle of the school's program. Whom do the students admire after they have finished at the school? I asked one teacher. Her reply: "The sentiment in my room is that they don't like Christians and they don't like white people, because they saw what has been done in the name of Christianity and what the white people did to the Indians and the Africans."

What about George Washington? I

asked, wondering if there was at least one admirable white person for American children to admire. What do you teach about him? "That he was the first president, that he was a slave owner, that he was rich—not much," she replied. This teacher (who, it must be stressed, was a dedicated person who gave a strong impression of caring deeply about her pupils), told me that her pupils did learn about Eli Whitney, the cotton gin inventor, in her social studies class. The children learn "that he stole his invention from a woman who didn't patent it," she said, spoiling my illusion that at least some whites could be portrayed in a generous and positive way under the strict rules of MCGFDA pedagogy.

Clichéd Diversity

This brings me to my second observation, about the use of that word *diversity* and its actual meaning, as in a phrase like "educational diversity rules." Actually, of course, multiculturalism has almost nothing to do with culture, and it isn't multi either. *Multiculturalism* is a code word for a left-wing political program that preempts opposition by presenting itself as a call for respect, tolerance, and diversity. The reality is that, as it is practiced, multiculturalism is not respectful or tolerant of difference, and its idea of diversity is an extremely truncated one. Diversity to a multiculturalist means a group of people who look different and who have different sexual practices, but who, when it comes to politics, think pretty much alike.

Put another way, "diversity" in practice is actually a political philosophy lying on a rather narrow band of the political-cultural spectrum that is utterly and exclusively Western in origin and inspiration. As a journalist who has done a fair amount of traveling in the world, I sometimes imagine what a multiculturalist would make of the actual diversity that exists across the globe, as opposed to the comforting, cliché-ridden "diversity" of the American multiculturalist imagination. The truth of the matter is this: if you want real multiculturalism, get on an airplane and go someplace else—out there in that great region of the world called Abroad, where practices like female circumcision abound, along with amputation of the hands of thieves, head-to-foot veils for women, and death sentences for those who write supposedly "blasphemous" books. That place called Abroad, by the way, is not the place where tolerance for homosexuality was invented, or equal rights for women, or where the phrase about all men being born equal and endowed by their creator with certain inalienable rights was struck. Try getting on the bus in China and you will see what multiculturalism is all about.

My point is that multiculturalism is at best a misnomer, a well-intended but inaccurate synonym for a set of values that is Western in origin and that makes up a key part of the American culture to which we all actually belong, even as multiculturalism denies that there is such a thing as a common American culture. The funny thing is that in all of my travels among the multiculturalists, I almost never encountered one who had actually bothered to undertake serious study of another culture. It might have something to do with the fact that it's a lot easier and more emotionally gratifying to learn a few honeyed and heartwarming clichés than to acquire in-depth knowledge.

Except, of course, when our own culture enters the picture and then, suddenly, the same warm feelings about the worth and value of all cultures no longer apply. One of multiculturalism's main features is its denigration of the West. The multiculturalist is a bit like the "idiot" in *The Mikado* who sings enthusiastic praises of "all centuries but this and every country but his own." There are more than a few odd things about this, not least of them the fact that nothing could be more Western in origin and in values than multiculturalism itself. Beyond that is the not insignificant fact that our culture happens to have produced a larger number of people living in stable conditions of freedom and prosperity than ever before in human history. We have our problems, true, but we are also better off in the United States of America with our own culture, not with the Chinese culture or the African culture, or what the inventors of those heartwarming clichés like to call the holistic Native American culture. For the members of my subgroup, the Jews, the gradual realization in practice of American values has led to greater prosperity for more people in conditions of the greatest political freedom and the fullest participation than at any time in Jewish history since the destruction of the Second Temple. There is, in other words, something more to this culture than the allegory of unfairness and victimization that the pupils are learning at the Hans Christian Andersen School of Many Voices.

I, for one, prefer to be a member of the culture that we share as Americans. I am glad that, when I went to public school in a little town in southeastern Connecticut in the benighted and nonmulticulturalist 1950s, no well-meaning and virtuous educational bureaucrat had decreed how good it would be for me to have to stand up and say to the others, "My name is Richard Bernstein and my culture is Jewish American." To have done so would have been to reduce the real and ineffable complexity of human life to a few simple concepts that these bureaucrats, in their ignorance, think they understand. I would want my children, in their public institutions, to be treated irrespective of their private identities, not to have those identities hung on their breast like a badge of merit. I am a Jew. I am an American. It is for the public schools to inculcate the knowledge and the awareness that I need in the American part of my identity; the other part of it is my business.

Mastery or Representation?

What multiculturalism does, of course, is make private identities the business of bureaucrats. It also leads citizens to make demands on each other based on their racial or sexual identities, a practice that I believe will prove to be divisive and harmful. And it encourages children to see themselves as defined by their origins rather than as self-fashioning individuals. Multiculturalism is based on the idea that race and ethnicity determine not only your social position but also a great deal about the way you learn and look at the world. One of the multiculturalist leaders I encountered in my research a few years ago was an educational consultant named Peggy McIntosh of the Wellesley Center for Research on Women, who lectures to school systems around the country on such things as white privilege and the different "way of knowing" of black children and white children. This is a little hard to believe, but Ms. McIntosh gets a respectful hearing for the idea that white children engage in something called "pinnacled learning," while black children engage something that she calls the "lateral" part of the psyche. In "pinnacled" learning the stress is on "mastery," on correctness versus wrongness, while lateral learning has to do with "our connections with the world, as we grow and develop as bodies in the body of the world."

The plain fact is that if children are going to do well in life as adults they are going to have to achieve a degree of "mastery," of learning how to get things right rather than wrong. Certainly every child is entitled to sensitive, individual treatment, to a degree of nurturing and encouragement that is appropriate to that child. But the various theories about multiculturalist education—most important, that children's all-important self-esteem hinges on, as the common phrase has it, "seeing themselves reflected in the curriculum"—are more often than not just a lot of silliness masquerading as sensitivity to the spiritual makeup of each child. The truth is that the children who are doing the best in school today, Jews and Asians, are precisely those children most ignored by the multiculturalist imperative. They are the children whose groups are almost not reflected in the curriculum at all. In Milwaukee a few years ago, half of the valedictorians in the city's high schools were the children of Hmong refugees, a group that, you can be sure, had not yet been incorporated into the multiculturalist curriculum.

And yet, the effort to create a curriculum based not on what children need to know but on some principle of racial and ethnic representativeness continues to gain momentum in school systems across the country. It is the rough equivalent of *Masterpieces of Women's Literature*, with its implicit advocacy of the idea that literature has sex or race, that there is something fundamentally different in the idea of women's literature or men's literature. When it comes to literature, I think that one would be far more challenged by Sophocles than by Erica Jong, and I would rather that schools taught the former, even if Sophocles is just another dead white European male and a representative of the white male patriarchal culture.

In the educational sphere, diversity sweeps out of the picture the inescapable fact that there is a body of knowledge that all children must master for success in the future and that this knowledge has no race or sex. To encourage children and their parents in the idea that racial and sexual representativeness is the key to a better educational experience is to defraud them. That is the most painful irony of the multiculturalist-diversity program: it is harmful and fraudulent for the very people it is supposedly aimed at saving. *Masterpieces of Women's Literature* is a political program justifying itself as a literary one. Multiculturalism is, similarly, an effort to advance a debatable political proposition, a debatable vision of American life, as an educational panacea. We shouldn't fall into the honeyed multiculturalist trap. We don't need it and shouldn't want it.

City Journal, Spring 1998

Sol Stern

The Rebirth of American History?

“What can we Americans do to keep ourselves from declining as a great power?" a questioner asked the best-selling British historian Paul Johnson recently.

"You have to believe in yourself," replied Johnson, author most recently of *A History of the American People*. "To do this, you must teach your children about your history. Instill in them what's in the Constitution. They should know large parts of the Declaration of Independence by heart. This will lead to a belief in America itself." Having lived through his own country's loss of confidence and precipitous decline, the 69-year-old Johnson knew whereof he spoke.

Though Americans notoriously haven't been taking this advice for several decades—schools have taught little of our national history, and taught it execrably—hopeful signs are on the horizon. A new series of unabashedly patriotic American history textbooks has sold over one million copies. A few states, particularly Virginia, have instituted rigorous standards of what public school pupils must study in required history courses. And in New York City, an innovative public high school that focuses on American history is inducting classes filled with immigrants into that unique tradition of freedom and inclusiveness that is the indispensable glue holding together the nation's common civic culture. It is giving these newcomers the means, as George Washington put it, to become "assimilated to our customs, measures and laws; in a word soon become one people."

But before looking at these hopeful signs of renewal, consider for a moment the dark background of historical ignorance that makes these signs look so especially bright by contrast. Many of the nation's middle schools and high schools no longer offer American history, and New York State's high schools require only a single, two-semester course in *post–Civil War* U.S. history. The majority of American students leave high school historically illiterate. According to the 1994 nationwide tests administered by the National Assessment of Educational Progress, 57 percent of high school seniors scored below the minimally passing grade. Only one in four could tell in which century Lincoln was president, and only one in five knew anything about Reconstruction. "In most countries the study of history is inseparable from the spirit of the country," the historian John Patrick Diggins has written. "The United States is the exception."

The little that high school students do learn about our past is largely a swamp of error and special-pleading. Government standards of what kids should know are part of the problem. In a fit of political naiveté, the Bush administration's chair of the National Endowment for the Humanities, Lynne Cheney, hired the National Center for History in the Schools to develop the first-ever set of national history standards. This outfit's head, UCLA's Gary Nash, exemplifies the triumphant march of 1960s New Left graduate students through university history departments. His scholarly writing stresses the importance of social movements of the "oppressed" over "white-oriented hero-worshiping" history. His book, *Red, White, and Black: The Peoples of Early America,* purports to show that the American polity sprang not so much from the Eighteenth-century European enlightenment as from a great "convergence" of European, American Indian, and African influences, in equal parts.

The first version of the National History Standards in 1991 set off one of the fiercer battles of the culture wars. Indian lore dominates the early parts of the text; George Washington merits two mentions; Western civilization drops a few more notches in importance. But working-class and feminist protest, as John Patrick Diggins observed, "parades itself through the text until it seems as though the only meaning of history lies in the shouts coming from the streets. In the NHS, 1968 lives!"

After much public sniping—99 senators expressed dismay, as did mainstream historians, such as Diane Ravitch and Arthur Schlesinger Jr., who cling to that battered old revolutionary ideal of *E pluribus unum*—Nash's group issued a revised set of standards, which eliminated some of the more egregious examples of anti-Western, anti-white-male bias. While the earlier draft, for example, depicted the cold war as a kind of "swordplay" between two equally blameworthy superpowers, the revised draft conceded that there really was such a thing as Soviet totalitarianism and that Stalinist repression in Eastern Europe provoked an appropriate response from the West. These changes mollified some. But the revised standards remain heavily multicultural.

Nevertheless, instead of history, whether multicultural or not, what most schoolchildren get is an unwholesome brew called social studies, concocted by the National Council for Social Studies (NCSS), which represents the teachers of such stuff. From its start in the 1920s, the NCSS has believed that academic history—which some of its leaders have disparaged as "pastology"—is elitist and irrelevant. The organization has successfully lobbied state education departments to require little or no history. Instead, it has filled the schools with a hodgepodge of "global studies," "cultural studies," even "peace studies"—which present all cultures and civilizations as equal in value. A dash of therapeutic programs, from self-esteem to conflict resolution to AIDS awareness, completes the social studies mix.

These topics make at least a smattering of history inescapable, but most high school social studies teachers are ill-equipped to teach even that fragment. According to Diane Ravitch, only 18 percent of them have completed a college major or minor in history; most of the rest are education-school grads. In New York you can teach high school social studies (and even 11th-grade American history) without having taken a single college-level history course.

If the NCSS had its way, America would reconstruct its entire educational system to reflect a race- and gender-centered philosophy of pedagogy and child development. The organization's official policy paper, "Curriculum Guidelines for Multicultural Education," is one of the scariest documents in American education today, going far beyond the demand that social studies curriculums vent the grievances of a rainbow coalition of ethnic and racial groups. In the tone of a commissar's lecture at a political reeducation camp, the NCSS exhorts teachers, administrators, and other school employees to think and act multiculturally during every moment of the school day, lest they become accomplices of American culture's lurking racism. School personnel should scrutinize every aspect of the school environment—from classroom teaching styles and the pictures on the walls to the foods served in the lunchroom and the songs sung in the school assemblies—to be sure they reflect "multicultural literacy."

At the heart of the NCSS guidelines lies a fundamentally racist assumption. "[T]he instructional strategies and learning styles most often favored in the nation's schools," the guidelines declare, "are inconsistent with the cognitive styles, cultural orientations, and cultural characteristics of some groups of students of color." These students flourish under "cooperative teaching techniques" rather than the "competitive learning activities" that work for white kids. This assertion sounds dangerously close to City College professor Leonard Jeffries's vaporings about black "sun children" and white "ice children." Certainly, for the NCSS, the ideal of a race-neutral classroom is a mirage. Teachers who strive toward a single standard of excellence, who presume to treat all students equally, are doing something harmful, not admirable. We are left, finally, with this Orwellian conclusion: "Schools should recognize that they cannot treat all students alike or they run the risk of denying equal educational opportunity to all persons."

In New York you can teach high school social studies and 11th-grade American history without having taken a college-level history course.

Those students who do study history usually study it out of textbooks that are, in about equal measure, mendacious and dull. Gilbert Sewall, a former *Newsweek* education writer who, as director of the American Textbook Council, has studied the textbook industry for years, notes that since the 1970s publishers have come under intense pressure from various left-wing advocacy groups (some with federal government financing) to create a politically correct, multiculturalist version of American history under the guise of eliminating "racist or sexist" material from the books. One such organization, financed by liberal Protestant churches, published a 1988 volume called *Thinking and Rethinking U.S. History*, which was brutally frank about its intentions. "We explicitly believe that all textbooks and all literature are on the side either of progress, of the status quo, or of regression," it opined. Here is the view of America's founding that the group wants children to derive from social studies textbooks: "We see the Revolution of 1776 as—among other things—a step in achieving greater social justice for one group of people—white males."

Today's history (and social studies) textbooks are unreadably dull because, in addition to multiculturalism in content, they also reflect an affirmative-action approach to authorship. The authors are not individuals but committees, backed up by consultants and teacher-reviewers, all chosen according to the textbook industry's diversity requirements—so many blacks, so many Hispanics, so many women.

In a recent speech, Sandra Feldman, the new president of the American Federation of Teachers, warned that without strong public schools, America will have a situation "where our rich diversity becomes a source of balkanization and division, because common public schooling will no longer be the way into the American mainstream and will no longer hold our society together." Feldman may not have noticed, but it is organizations of public school educators like the NCSS that are trashing the very idea of an "American mainstream," producing the "balkanization and division" she rightly fears. Only by returning to the study of Washington, Jefferson, and Lincoln, of Frederick Douglass and Martin Luther King, all part of the "spirit of the country," can we recapture a common civic culture for our children.

That resurgence isn't coming from organizations like Feldman's union or the NCSS but from grassroots movements of dissident parents, teachers, and concerned citizens. It is a movement for change from the bottom up, as Gary Nash would put it. Private citizens are beginning to fight back, as in California, where parents, including a large percentage of Hispanics, will almost certainly pass the June referendum that would sharply curtail bilingual programs in the state's schools, in an effort to get immigrant children immersed in the common civic culture as quickly as possible.

One of the brightest examples of the resurgence is the spectacular success of a fed-up parent who protested by becoming a historian herself. Joy Hakim, a reporter in Virginia Beach, became outraged with the way her children were being taught American history and resolved to do something about it. Disgusted with the children's stupefyingly boring textbooks, she concluded that she could do a better job herself. She wanted to tell a positive story about America in a coherent narrative style. It took her five years to complete *A History of US*, a ten-volume series aimed at children from the fifth to the eighth grade. It then took as long to find a publisher: after all, she came from outside the education industry.

At last, Oxford University Press decided to take the risk. But because Oxford doesn't "produce" books for the school market, it placed Hakim's books in regular trade-book stores—5,000 copies of each of the first five volumes. The results were astonishing. Based almost entirely on word of mouth by parents and teachers who found the volumes while browsing in the likes of Barnes & Noble, Hakim's books took off. *The History of US* has now sold over one million copies. It has also penetrated the regular textbook market and is being adopted by hundreds of school districts around the country. "The lesson is," Hakim says, "that we shouldn't have any books in school that are not good enough to be in a bookstore."

The popularity of *A History of US* is even more encouraging when you consider its tone of optimism, its old-fashioned credo that America really is a new nation much greater than the sum of its multicultural parts. Listen to the triumphant message Hakim offers her young readers in the opening pages: "Learning about our country's history will make you understand what it means to be an American. And being an American is a privilege. People all over the world wish that they, too, could be American. Why? Because we are a nation that is trying to be fair to all our citizens. . . .

"We believe the United States of America is the most remarkable nation that has ever existed. No other nation, in the history of the world, has ever provided so much freedom, so much justice, and so much opportunity to so many people."

Hakim's history doesn't scant the shameful episodes in our country's past. At the start she tells her readers: "Some people will tell you of evil forces in the United States. They will tell you of past horrors like slavery and war. They will tell you of poverty and injustice today. They will be telling the truth.

"We didn't say the United States is perfect. Far from it. Being fair to everyone isn't as easy as you may think. (Do you treat everyone you know equally? How about people you don't like?) The United States government has made some terrible mistakes. It is still making mistakes. But usually this nation can, and does, correct its mistakes."

And then, horror of horrors, Hakim commits what any self-respecting multiculturalist would denounce as the cardinal sin of being "judgmental."

She informs the children: "The more you study history, the more you will realize that all nations are not the same. Some are better than others. Does that seem like an unfair thing to say? Maybe, but we believe it."

Getting kids to learn "what it means to be an American," to come to the proud realization of their country's excellence, is a mission that has attracted two other private citizens from outside the orbit of professional education, businessmen and philanthropists Richard Gilder and Lewis E. Lehrman. They are tireless crusaders for the study of American history. Lehrman has taught history at Yale; Gilder (a member of *City Journal*'s publication committee) majored in history in college and is a generous funder of Civil War battlefield preservation. They hold the country's largest private collection of American historical documents, on loan to the Pierpont Morgan Library. Four years ago they established the Gilder Lehrman Institute of American History to reinforce the beleaguered troops battling for the preservation of American history in the schools.

Though the institute runs a full program of lectures, exhibits, and summer seminars for high school history teachers, its most dramatic and potentially most influential activity is its work in New York City's public schools. In 1995, it began special, extra-credit Saturday courses in American history for middle-school students in District 26 in Queens. Hundreds of students showed up, and the courses' unexpected popularity encouraged the institute to sponsor a special-theme high school in American history. In September 1996, the Academy of American Studies opened its doors, on the fourth floor of the rundown, 100-year-old former Long Island City High School. The entering freshman class, 125 strong, came from all over Queens.

In one sense, the Academy of American Studies is just another star in a constellation of more than 100 experimental "new vision" public schools, created as smaller, somewhat more autonomous alternatives to the city's big, bureaucratically run, geographically zoned high schools. But the Academy of American Studies is unique in the extraordinary amount of extra academic work its focus on American history actually requires. In addition to the regular state-mandated three years of social studies, the Academy requires students to take four years of very rigorous American history courses. Every student thus carries six academic classes each semester, more coursework than most students take at the elite Stuyvesant and Bronx Science High Schools. In addition, with funds the Gilder Lehrman Institute contributes, all the students take trips throughout the year to historic sites such as Valley Forge and Gettysburg.

What makes the Academy even more noteworthy is that it doesn't draw its students from the academically gifted. Under Board of Education rules, it must select its students (half of them by lottery) from across the spectrum of achievement as measured by standardized tests. The typical Academy student scores in the 60th percentile in standardized tests, often speaks a foreign language at home, and comes from a working-class background. In this school, the academic study of history is hardly an elite enterprise.

"Why should it be?" asks Richard Gilder. "These immigrant kids come here not knowing much of our story. But the study of American history makes them understand that this nation is based on great ideas, and that thousands of people were willing to die for those ideas. I want those kids to become proud of our national heritage, to understand that they have the same right to this history of ours as anyone who has been here for 15 generations."

To enter the battered old building housing the Academy is to come face-to-face with the dilemmas springing from a national policy of unfettered immigration combined with a school culture of de-Americanization. On the first three floors of the building is a special high school for new immigrants, called the Newcomers Academy. Some 1,000 students with limited English skills are trying to get up to speed in the English language while they begin taking some regular academic subjects, an admirable goal. But the posters I saw hanging on the walls raised perplexing questions. Under the big heading "Multicultural," one of them showed examples of the students' essays, all of them on their former countries. Another poster, a collection of pictures of students, bore the title "Diversity." It was as if those in charge of the school were announcing their ambivalence about their students' assimilation into American culture.

Three flights upstairs, at the Academy of American Studies, the visitor sees no such ambivalence. Every one of the school announcements, the lists of honor-roll members, and examples of student work are mounted on poster boards with an American flag in the background. Clearly, the purpose in this school is not to look backward to where the children came from but forward to their new country. Like Hakim's books, the school unashamedly trumpets America's ideals and achievements.

The Academy's principal, Michael Serber, 58, walked me through the corridors during a class break and stopped to ask over a dozen students where they or their parents came from. In just a few minutes I had met children from China, Colombia, Croatia, the Dominican Republic, Ghana, Pakistan, Poland, Russia, and Yugoslavia. Serber, a former social studies chairman at a large Queens high school, jumped at the chance of directing the Academy, not only to have his own school but to help plan a real history curriculum. "What's called for in the state curriculum, one year of American History that only covers the period after the Civil War, is really insufficient to give young people any real insight into the events and individuals that made the country what it is," he told me. "That's particularly true out here in Queens for all these immigrant kids. I really believe that the bond that can hold people from different countries and cultures together is a shared understanding of America's past."

I sat in on a ninth-grade American history class taught by 31-year-old Mark Solkoff, one of Serber's two history teachers. The day's lesson: the development of religious freedom in colonial America. The students had read sections on the Pilgrims and Roger Williams from an excellent, traditional, three-decade-old textbook that would now be considered hopelessly politically incorrect. They also read some original documents, including the *Remonstrance of the Inhabitants of the Town of Flushing to Governor Peter Stuyvesant*, asking for the extension of tolerance to non-Christians wishing to settle in New Amsterdam. Solkoff was making a personal connection for these immigrant children, getting them to see that 300 years ago, in their very own borough, other newcomers to these shores were laying the groundwork for the nation's principles of inclusiveness and religious tolerance. He posed a question to the class: "Why was the idea of separating religion from the state so important to the new settlers?" A student from Pakistan responded: "Because they escaped from countries where the king tried to force them to go to a church they didn't believe in."

She informs the children: "The more you study history, the more you will realize that all nations are not the same. Some are better than others."

I visited the tenth-grade history class, covering the Civil War period. The students had been broken up into groups, each with a Civil War battlefield map and other readings, and each assigned to report on one of the major battles of the war—Bull Run, Fredericksburg, Gettysburg, Richmond. One student from each group stood up and delivered a short talk on how the battle his group was researching had developed, who won, how many casualties resulted, and what the battle's importance was to the course of the war. Each student seemed totally engrossed in playing armchair general.

Academy students don't gloss over the problematic aspects of American history. The tenth-graders were completely familiar with the Amistad episode long before the movie came out. Posted on the walls were mock abolitionist newspapers the students created for one of their assignments. They included reports on one of Frederick Douglass's most bitter speeches on the evils of slavery. The ninth-graders were reading John Chester Miller's *Wolf by the Ear*, a critical biography of Jefferson that discusses the moral issues regarding Jefferson's holding of slaves and the more controversial aspects of his private life. Loredana Purneval, a 15-year-old sophomore born in Romania and one of the Academy's academic stars, remembers that last year her ninth-grade class's unit on Jefferson ended with the students engaging in a debate: "Was Thomas Jefferson a hypocrite or a product of his times?" Says Purneval: "It was the most interesting thing we did. Here was a great leader who said, 'All men are created equal,' yet he owned slaves. Jefferson once swore on 'the altar of God, eternal hostility to every form of tyranny over the minds of men,' yet he was in favor of forcing the Indians to give up their way of life. But we didn't just listen to the teacher telling us what was right. We had to do a lot of reading and then come to a conclusion by ourselves."

One of the other books the ninth-graders read is Richard Brookhiser's 1997 biography of George Washington, *Founding Father*. Last winter, when the Academy invited Brookhiser to speak to the students, he didn't know what to expect. After all, with his book's heavy emphasis on Washington's heroic leadership as key to the success of the American Revolution, it is a defiant example of history written "from the top down"—an approach most public school social studies teachers dislike. So Brookhiser was more than pleased to discover that not only was his book an assigned text at this school full of immigrant children but also that the students could thrill to his tales of Washington's military and political exploits.

"Those kids really paid close attention," Brookhiser recalls. "What really excited them was the military aspect of Washington's career. They clearly responded to that. Their questions about the various battles were intelligent." Brookhiser found it an uplifting experience. "The last time I can recall Washington being associated with a school was when his name was taken off a school in New Orleans, because he was a slaveholder. But this was an important man, a great man, who had an enormous influence on the way this country was created. And these students were interested in getting a look at everything he did."

Over 800 students from all over Queens applied this year for the 125 openings the Academy has for incoming freshmen next fall. Michael Serber doesn't fool himself into thinking they all want to come for the American history component; parents also like the school's small size and safe, nurturing environment. Yet the first two years of the school's operation have demonstrated that ordinary New York City high school students from a wide variety of racial and ethnic backgrounds are willing to work extra hours to achieve some mastery of this country's complex history—the "pastology" that the social studies profession so disdains.

Next fall, another American history high school will open in Brooklyn, modeled on the Academy of American Studies. The Gilder Lehrman Institute is working on having one in each borough soon. In that, there is a great measure of hope. The success of the Academy and the popularity of Joy Hakim's books exemplify the grassroots efforts needed to extricate the public schools from the wasteland professional educators created when they expelled American history. The multiculturalism that replaced it now seems to have no other purpose but to demoralize our children about the country they live in, while keeping them ignorant about the glorious past that gives them so promising a future.

Research for this article was supported by the Brunie Fund for New York Journalism.

Atlanta, 1998

Why General Knowledge Should Be a Goal of Education in a Democracy

By E.D. Hirsch, Jr.

I'm proud to say that Core Knowledge is a teachers' movement. I don't want to downplay all those indispensable parents and administrators who are helping this cause, but Core Knowledge has been from the start a bottom-up, not a top-down, movement.

That's why we are still puzzling and surprising the people at the top—all those powerful people who have withheld their blessing and their money—they are wondering where did these people come from? How could they do this when we didn't approve and we didn't pay?

I have an answer for them. Core Knowledge is growing without them because this is chiefly a parents' and teachers' movement, and you simply can't buy the kind of dedication that Core Knowledge teachers have.

Those of you who teach young children did not get into this profession because you wanted money and prestige. You got into this profession because you are committed to the children.

In fact, one of the reasons Core Knowledge originally had trouble getting started with teachers was that people were telling them it was dry as bones and wasn't centered on children. That was false, but it was very effective with teachers who had come into this profession because they are committed to children.

But once the word got out to teachers that children truly thrive on Core Knowledge, that children love it, that there really isn't a conflict between being knowledge-centered and being child-centered—once that idea got out, then Core Knowledge became a teachers' movement. And it continues to be a teachers' movement, and I hope it always will be. So I'm grateful to all of you. And I have a confession to make. It isn't just the people at the top who are surprised. I have to admit I'm also surprised at what you teachers have accomplished.

You've done it without coercion and with dedication, and with ever-increasing numbers, because you have become convinced that this is right for children—for all children, especially those who lack advantages at home. You are not just committed to children, you are committed to fairness. Our public schools were meant to realize equal opportunity for all, and in your Core Knowledge schools we are coming closer to that ideal than anywhere else in the country. The data we are getting is beginning to show that excellence and fairness do go together.

So to all of you here, and to your thousands of colleagues back home who couldn't come to Atlanta, I want to say thanks, keep it up. And may you continue to amaze us.

Well, as usual at this conference, you've had a great intellectual feast. I want to thank those scholars who have given you that feast. Do you suppose this is the teachers' conference that is all meat and almost no potatoes?

Anyway, this wouldn't be a true Core Knowledge conference if I didn't also include a little meat in these closing remarks. I know we can only take so much of this rich intellectual diet, so after so many rich sessions, I promise this will be a very brief mini-session and there will be just one big idea before I say "good-bye till next year."

The big idea could be grasped from a question I was once asked by the superintendent of a big district. "Why should scores go up on standardized tests in Core Knowledge schools if the tests aren't tied to the Core Knowledge curriculum?" It was a good, sensible question, and some of you may already know the answer. But, just in case you don't, let me say a few words, about the power of knowledge in creating general skills and competence in students. The reasons can be summarized in three statements that scientists have confirmed.

More knowledge makes you smarter.
More general knowledge makes you more generally competent in the tasks of life.

Giving everybody more general knowledge makes everybody more competent, and therefore creates a more just society.

Those ideas are pretty common-sensical, but teachers have usually been told something different. So it's worth summarizing the scientific consensus behind Core Knowledge, and explaining why general knowledge should be a goal of education in a democracy. They will answer the superintendent's question about why scores go up even when the tests aren't tied to the Core Knowledge curriculum.

First, knowledge makes you smarter.

I am one of those people who don't like Windows 95. But I still have a soft spot for Bill Gates and his big round glasses, because Bill Gates has brought glamour to Nerdism. He didn't bother to finish Harvard, but he's anything but ignorant. He knows a lot, and has correctly told our youth that wide reading and general knowledge are critical to competence. He's numerate, and literate. He would have done quite well on the TIMSS math and science tests, possibly ranking up there with Swedish twelfth-graders. You could also say that Bill Gates is independent-minded, has higher-order accessing skills, is a critical thinker, engages in metacognition, and exhibits the various creative competencies that American experts say are much more important than just knowing a bunch of facts.

But it happens that Bill Gates knows a lot of facts. He read a lot, and always has. Cognitive psychologists tell us that if competent people like Gates didn't know a lot of facts they couldn't be critical, creative, independent thinkers. The research literature is very clear on this point: that highly skilled intellectual competence comes after, not before, you know a lot of "mere facts." First facts, then facility. It's the only way for us to get the understanding and attain all those higher-order thinking skills which are so widely praised by educational experts and so wrongly contrasted with "mere facts."

In my recent book, I spent a lot of space showing why the tendency of experts to emphasize thinking skills and to disparage facts in such educational slogans as "less is more" and "mere rote learning" do have a grain of truth (otherwise they wouldn't be so popular), but also that they are highly simplified and misleading. But instead of attacking these slogans, I want to accentuate the positive, and summarize the evidence that explains why knowing a lot o f "mere facts" makes you smarter.

For one thing, psychologists have discovered that knowing more makes you better able to learn new things, and better able to think critically. That is, knowledge enables you to learn and to think. That fact has immense implications for determining the goals of public schooling in a modern democracy.

But why does more knowledge make you smarter? In a brilliant experiment, Keith Stanovich, the distinguished Canadian reading researcher, showed that when two people have the same level and kind of IQ, the person who has the more general knowledge will learn faster and function more competently than the person who has less general knowledge. That experiment has a particular relevance to American schools because we Americans tend to assume that academic competence is mainly a product of innate ability. Even when we are willing to criticize the idea of IQ in favor of such notions as tripartite intelligence (Steinberg) or multiple intelligences (Gardner), the very prominence we give the word "intelligence" still accords too much importance to innate ability, as compared with effort and knowledge. Yes, it's consoling to insist that all children do have some type of high intelligence, but, in the end, such an emphasis is downright misleading, because it over-stresses the importance of intelligence in schooling.

Innate talent is important, but our overemphasis on intelligence is a peculiarly American prejudice that stems from the origins of our culture in the 19th Century Romantic movement. Harold Stevenson and others have shown that the Asian view emphasizing knowledge and effort is the more accurate view. We placed so much stress on innate talent because we have been brought up on the romantic idea that the aim of education is to follow "nature." You'll notice "nature" has the same root as "innate." But psychologists have shown that this emphasis on innate ability is a highly misleading assumption in education. The average differences in innate abilities are far less pronounced than the average differences in achieved abilities produced by knowledge and effort. It turns out that creativity is not spontaneous, as the romantics thought, but requires long study and master-knowledge. Even the most talented person needs about ten years of effort to reach an expert level, and creativity usually takes even longer. For instance, scientists have shown that having a genius for mental arithmetic turns out to be based less on innate talent than on knowledge and intensive practice. Knowledge and practice—these are the things that make you smart.

Why do experts learn new things faster and better than novices? Not because experts have more innate talent, but because they know more. And what they know has become second nature to them, and frees their minds to focus on higher-level aspects of a problem. In a famous experiment, the Dutch psychologist De Root showed that chess experts have no more innate mental ability on average than novices do, but are able to learn and solve chess problems faster and better, because they have what he called "erudition"—which is to say knowledge. Their knowledge has become so integrated and "chunked" that their conscious minds can focus on a small number of key features. Edison's comment the "Genius is one percent inspiration and ninety-nine percent perspiration" may be off by only a few percentage points.

This leads to point two, that the more broad general knowledge you have, the more broadly competent you become in dealing with the tasks of life.

Let's take an example close to home: being a good teacher. It turns out that the biggest factor in student achievement is teacher quality (surprise!). And guess what is the single most consistent predictor of teacher quality leading to student achievement? It's the score that a teacher made on the verbal SAT test. Don't panic. A person's score on the verbal SAT rises dramatically as soon as the person knows more words. The verbal SAT is nothing more than a vocabulary test. Don't jump to the all-too-American conclusion that high SAT scores mean that a person is innately smart. The verbal SAT does not tell you how innately smart you are. Absolutely not. It tells you how many words you know. Those questions that look like thinking questions, such as "X is to Y as P is to BLANK"—well, correctly filling that blank depends less on brains than simply knowing the meaning of X, Y and P, and the realities those words represent. So let's take the next step. An advanced vocabulary test like the SAT is not just a test of words, because words stand for things, and for knowledge of things. Yep, you guessed it; the verbal SAT is a test of general knowledge.

That explains the findings about student achievement and the teacher's verbal SAT. You tend to be a good teacher if you tend to be a generally competent person, and you tend to be a generally competent person if you have a lot of general knowledge. Furthermore, what is Tu for teachers is also true for their students. Knowledge makes them more competent, too. Core Knowledge teachers have told me with great enthusiasm that by teaching a rich banquet of knowledge, they feel they are getting smarter themselves. Well, it's true. More general knowledge makes you more generally competent. I won't take time to explain all the nitty gritty of why this is so. I did that in my recent book.

Instead I'll give another, very different example to show how universal is this connection between general knowledge and general skill. The armed forces gives every recruit a test called the AFQT, the Armed Forces Qualification Test. It's very much like the SAT. That is to say, it's not an IQ test, but rather a test of general knowledge. Given to hundreds of thousands, by now millions, of people, this test has offered scientists a huge field of research. For instance, there are several studies on the question: Does a higher score on that general knowledge test make you a more competent soldier? The answer is emphatically yes, whether the soldier's job is in electronics, or in just being a foot soldier. General knowledge makes you more competent on average no matter what job you do, whether it's being a clerk, a mechanic, a plain GI, or a platoon leader.
There's an economic twist to this story. That same general knowledge test, the AFQT, was used in a big sociological study called "The Longitudinal Study of Youth." This ongoing study has found the same thing the Army found about general knowledge and life competence. The more you know, the better you do in life. This has enormous implications for social justice and education, since scientists found that general knowledge correlates with annual income. And furthermore it correlates with annual income regardless of which racial or ethnic group you come from. Knowledge makes people competent regardless of race, class, or ethnicity. It is the great social equalizer.

This brings me to my third and last point, which I stated this way: "Giving everybody more knowledge makes everybody more competent, and creates a more just society." Since knowledge is the great equalizer, the schools have a huge opportunity and responsibility to provide more equal life chances for all students, no matter where they come from.

You who are teaching in Core Knowledge schools are in the vanguard of the new civil rights frontier. That frontier is knowledge, and that truth is showing up in the equity results you are achieving. I congratulate you on the time, the effort, and the dedication you bring to your work. You have become persuaded by your fellow teachers, and you have put children first.

So this is my conclusion. If knowledge is the new civil rights frontier, you are the new pioneers in American education. Before long, the rest will follow the trail you are blazing. I'll end by saying that you have my deep thanks, and see you in Orlando!

Investor's Business Daily, April 24, 1998

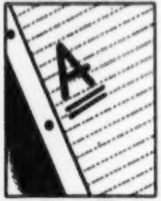
DOES GOOD PRACTICE MAKE PERFECT?

Six In 10 Educators Say No; Researchers Say Yes

By Matthew Robinson
Investor's Business Daily

Nothing attracts more ire from modern educators than asking children to memorize and practice, whether it be their spelling words or multiplication tables.

WHAT WORKS



■ No. 54 in an IBD series on education reform

When polled last year, some six of 10 education professors objected to having kids memorize material.

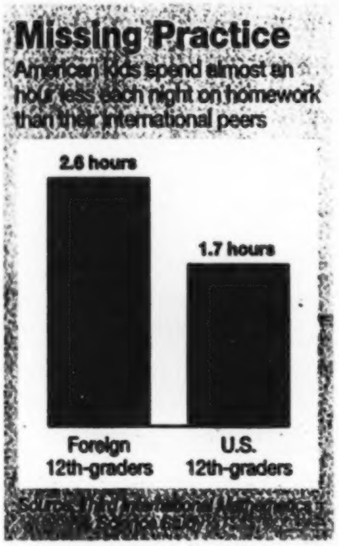
These educators, who teach K-12 teachers, warn that practice, homework and direct, systematic instruction turn kids into automatons, stifling their creativity and ultimately dooming their ability to learn.

They even have a term for it: "Drill and kill."

The result? American kids spend less time working under instruction, and do less homework than their global peers.

But new findings in cognitive science and psychology support drills and practice.

"Nothing flies more in the face of the last 20 years of research than the assertion that practice is bad," asserted Professors John Anderson, Lynne Reder and Herbert Simon of Carnegie-Mellon University.



Missing Practice

American kids spend almost an hour less each night on homework than their international peers

"All evidence . . . indicates that real competence only comes with extensive practice. By denying the critical role of practice, one is denying children the very thing they need to achieve competence," they wrote in a recent study. "The instructional problem is not to kill motivation by demanding drill, but to find tasks that provide practice — while at the same time sustaining interest."

That idea is causing a stir in the education world. Anderson, Reder and Simon are applying their findings in cognitive psychology to challenge the education status quo.

Kids, they argue, can learn better through "deliberate practice" — through hard work and constant feedback to master knowledge and tasks.

Of course, this is what most Americans think of when they are asked about education. They think of learning core knowledge that will be useful later in life.

"Nobody expects someone to be great without a great deal of practice and time in sports or music," Anderson said. "But it still seems that in the area of education, there is the notion that all we have to do is give a child a critical insight or inspiration and everything else will fall into place.

"Intellectual competence has to build up with the same kind of deliberate practice as musical talent or athletic ability," he added.

The education establishment's views on practice and memorization go back to the beginning of the century. They were popularized by progressive educators such as John Dewey, William Heard Kilpatrick and Carl Rogers.

Ideas in education drawn from these thinkers go by many names: rationalist or romantic theories of learning, constructivism, situated learning, project-style learning and discovery learning.

The theories have in common the belief that kids need only look inside themselves for knowledge. In this view, education is all about letting *kids* discover what they need to learn. In fact, some theorists claim that kids are actually hurt by direct, systematic instruction.

And such ideas get broad support in schools of education.

Fully 92% of education professors say that "teachers should see themselves as facilitators of learning, who enable their students to learn on their own." Only 7% think teachers should be "conveyors of knowledge who enlighten their students with what they know."

They also believe that direct instruction leads to "routinization." This, they think, drives out understanding.

"These valid objections to purely verbal, fragmented and passive education have ... been used as a blunt instrument to attack all emphasis on factual knowledge and vocabulary," wrote E.D. Hirsch in "The Schools We Need."

California learned the hard way that romantic theories of education don't work as well as direct instruction.

The State Board of Education reversed its position in '95 on whole language reading theory. Whole language says that kids learn to read the same way they learn to speak — by absorbing new words in the reading situation. Instead of teaching kids to sound out words and break down harder words, they would learn to guess words' meaning from context.

In other words, kids were largely left on their own to "discover" how to read and spell.

After almost a decade of practicing this method, the state scored at the bottom of national reading tests. The nation's biggest state now backs using direct instruction — including phonics instead of whole language to teach reading.

"Children vary in the amount of practice that is required for automaticity and fluency in reading to occur," the state's Comprehensive Reading Leadership Program found. "Some need to read a word only once to recognize it again with greater speed; others need more than 20 exposures. ... Therefore, it is vital that students read a large amount of text at their independent reading level, and that the text provide specific practice in the skills being learned."

Translation: Learning requires reinforcement — practice and memorization — to master a subject.

"It's the missing link in American education," said Arthur Bornstein, a memory training expert in Los Angeles. "Schools tell kids what to learn, but not how to do it."

Bornstein coaches schools on how to help students remember what they're taught. Bornstein has watched schools slowly move away from stressing drills.

"It's a tragedy," he said, "but too many schools now assume kids will just pick up things as they go along."

Some experts argue that the education establishment's downplaying of deliberate practice helps explain American students' lower test scores.

In the Third International Mathematics and Science Study, American students were near the bottom. U.S. high school seniors scored 19th out of 21 nations in math. In science, they scored 16th.

American kids get nearly an hour less homework a day than the foreign average — 1.7 hours compared with 2.6 hours.

A study by James W. Stigler, professor of education at the University of California, Los Angeles, found that the average Japanese student gets instruction 90% of the time spent in the classroom. American kids get it only 46% of the time.

But cognitive research shows practice isn't just important for students. Teachers need it, too. Asian teachers spend much more time preparing to teach lessons. And although American teachers have smaller classes, they get less prep time.

But do drills stifle creativity, as many educators charge? No, says Temple University psychology professor Robert W. Weisberg.

Weisberg has studied the link between creativity and knowledge in artists such as Mozart, Picasso and Jackson Pollack. What he's found is surprising.

"It's a paradox," Weisberg said. "There is evidence that deep immersion is required in a discipline before you produce anything of great novelty. Before you look at significant achievement, expect to see 10 years of deep immersion to gain knowledge."

But, he noted, "There is this concept that genius has leaps of insight way beyond everybody else. If you look at the backgrounds of these people, there is much more of a progression. They don't make leaps — they build in small pieces."

Studies show that the brain actually changes with deliberate practice. A report in the journal Science shows that the cortical areas of the brain devoted to controlling the fingers actually expand for expert violinists.

Of course, repetitive drilling has its skeptics.

"If deliberate practice just meant rote memorization, then I wouldn't like it," said Boston College psychology professor Ellen Winner. "If (it) means working at something until you got it just right, like in a play, then I am all for it."

> "Nobody expects someone to be great without a great deal of practice and time in sports or music. But it still seems that in the area of education, there is the notion that all we have to do is give a child a critical insight or inspiration and everything else will fall into place."
>
> — **John Anderson,**
> *Carnegie-Mellon University professor*

Investor's Business Daily, March 6, 1998

ARE SCHOOLS TOO HARD ON KIDS?

No, And It May Be Hurting Them, Research Shows

By Matthew Robinson
Investor's Business Daily

Hard classes, lots of homework, rigorous tests, tough grading. Do they help kids, or do they just crush their self-esteem?

WHAT WORKS

■ No. 47 in an IBD series on education reform

The answer is clear to many in the education establishment: It's the latter. They argue that kids' egos are fragile and that if you demand too much of them they can shatter.

But the latest research has found that tough course work benefits young students in the long run. By developing sharp cognitive skills, kids can go on to greater success in college and the workplace, where competition is intense.

Still, the public school system is not convinced that's true, and it eschews tough grading for methods that are meant to boost self-esteem. Purported social benefits aside, academic results are resoundingly poor — especially in inner-city schools.

Are we shortchanging our children's futures by not expecting more of them now?

> **A** 1997 Education Department study found more than four of five students who took algebra and geometry courses went on to college — twice the share of kids who didn't take such courses.

By and large, education professors, bureaucrats and teachers union officials don't think so. They're opposed to enforcing tougher standards and creating competition in the classroom.

In a recent poll by New York-based Public Agenda, education professors back less competitive grading. Some 64% think schools should avoid competition. And half of the professors surveyed think kids should be graded in teams rather than as individuals.

"To put it in a nutshell, at the college level, rank-and-file professors and people in leadership are in denial," said J.E. Stone, an educational psychologist at East Tennessee State University. "They think we just need to pacify the public's desire for higher standards. It's a very patronizing view of Americans."

The argument against grades, hard classes and testing is old and deeply entrenched. As far back as the '20s, William Heard Kilpatrick, the president of Teachers College at Columbia University argued for getting rid of them all.

William Glasser made the case even more boldly in '69. In his seminal book, "Schools Without Failure," he argued against objective tests and tough curricula.

Glasser wrote that grading "was probably the school practice that most produces failure in students." He also said that it was an "unpremeditated plot to destroy."

While politicians and the public turn to higher standards, the education establishment still embraces many of Glasser's and Kilpatrick's ideas.

The result has been decades of less challenging textbooks, easier classes, fewer homework assignments, social promotion and falling study time.

Harvard Professor Paul E. Peterson likens the modern school to shopping malls, where "students are treated as customers with different tastes and objectives."

Public schools have no incentive system to reward success and stop failure, critics say. In effect, their job has been reduced from challenging kids to learn all they can, to simply warehousing them until graduation day.

"The shopping mall high school has been constructed on what might be called an incarceration theory of education: It is more important to keep students inside the school's four walls than to make sure they take quality courses," Peterson wrote.

In recent years, avant-garde educators have backed the even more radical "open classroom." Open classrooms don't place students in classes ranked by ability or age. Kids are free to learn at their own pace.

"In the progressive-Romantic view of education, to give numbers or letter grades to students in the classroom or on tests is a fundamental educational mistake," wrote E.D. Hirsch in "The Schools We Need," a book critical of modern education.

According to progressive educators, grades "send an implicit message that one child is better or abler than another," Hirsch added, "and thus fosters undesirable competition instead of cooperation."

But competition works, recent studies show. Tougher classes and hard grading help kids learn and don't turn them off.

A 1997 U.S. Education Department study found that kids who took tough math classes were more likely to go to college. More than four of five students who took algebra and geometry courses went on to college — twice the share of kids who didn't take such courses.

For low-income students, the value of math holds. Of those who took algebra and geometry, more than seven of 10 went to college. Still, only 46% of low-income students take the tough classes.

University of Chicago Professor Robert Meyer found that math knowledge is boosted most by the hardest math classes — such as trigonometry, geometry, pre-calculus and calculus —with little effect coming from basic math.

This is bad news. American high schoolers rarely press on to these tougher math levels. Almost a third of high school graduates earned less than two math credits.

Meyer also found that courses such as chemistry and physics can significantly increase knowledge and raise achievement. In fact, they boost them by almost half as much as traditional math courses.

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>
> —**Paul E. Peterson,** *Harvard professor*

This, he says, is an argument for more challenging work.

"The evidence seems to show that you can't look for easy, quick fixes," Meyer said. "We have to make sure reforms take the harder path even though it may be harder to teach."

But tough curricula don't just prepare kids for college. Research says that hard classes can also boost cognitive abilities, which helps people their entire adult life in the working world.

"Hard academic courses in high school can make a difference," Peterson said.

Peterson and his fellow researchers found that if a student raised his grade-point average by one point and sought tougher academic classes, the effort resulted in a 13.1% increase in "composite cognitive skills." In IQ terms, this means a jump of eight points in high school alone.

So it's not just a matter of higher education. Tough classes can boost mental power, not just the academic record.

What are challenging courses?

Those that prepare students for college — such as algebra, calculus, chemistry, physics and English.

Such findings seem intuitive. Still, they have a hard time getting noticed in academia.

"The single biggest problem is that everyone in the education community is, for all practical purposes, anti-achievement," said Stone, the East Tennessee State professor.

And any higher standards that are tried in the schools "will be washed out" by education professors, he added. "They are the ones who gave us what we've got now."

Hard classes and testing also create pressures that redirect troublemakers toward learning, since every student is in the same boat.

Without rigorous standards and exams, Peterson said, "Kids form cartels that harass students who work hard, and that creates a milieu that hurts learning."

Education Professor John Bishop of Cornell University calls this "nerd harassment."

It can take many forms. Often minority students who aim high can be attacked for trying to "act white." This can be especially prevalent in inner-city schools.

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Selected Readings on School Reform

Higher Education

As ground zero in the culture wars, colleges and universities have long been the site of battles between Great Society-style strategies to enforce equality and the marketplace's demand for excellence and flexibility. Three articles serve as reports from the front.

Jessica Gavora authored "Clinton's Classroom Quotas" in *The Wall Street Journal*, tackling the dilemma of gender equity in higher education. She highlights some of the pitfalls associated with enforcement of Title IX of the Higher Education Act, which mandates equal gender opportunity at institutions of higher education. It seems that the Clinton administration is extending its enforcement activities even into student course selection patterns.

Next, *The Chronicle of Higher Education* documents the recent fuss over Mayor Rudoph Giuliani's plan to eliminate remedial education at the City University of New York. The resulting compromise allows remediation to continue at CUNY's community colleges but reinstates solid academic standards and entrance requirements at the four-year campuses. (Also be sure to read our *Fordham Report*, "Remediation in Higher Education: A Symposium," included in this mailing.)

Finally, Ted Marchese, writing in the *AAHE Bulletin*, details the emergence of a new academic industry, combining the profit motive with distance learning and other technologies to create a series of major competitors for traditional colleges and universities. As corporations partner with academic institutions to provide virtual courses to a growing market, will the academy move from institution to industry?

MAS

Wall Street Journal, April 21, 1998

Clinton's Classroom Quotas

By Jessica Gavora

Say, here's an idea: The federal government should regulate the number of boys permitted to take biochemistry courses in American universities. Sound crazy? Not to President Clinton, who hopes to do just that. In fact, his Justice Department is now drafting regulations that would police the ratio of men to women in almost every realm of academia.

Usually coy about favoring quotas, the administration in this case is openly insisting upon them. The effort represents an enormous expansion of federal power under Title IX, an amendment to the 1964 Civil Rights Act passed in 1972. Originally conceived simply as a guarantee of equal access to education regardless of sex, the law has of late been used to force colleges to expand women's sports programs and cut back athletics for men. Last June at a White House ceremony celebrating Title IX's 25th anniversary, Mr. Clinton announced: "Every school and every education program that receives federal assistance in the entire country"—that is, virtually all of them—"must understand tha complying with Title IX is not optional. I is the law and the law must be enforced."

Devastating Effect

Judging from the way Title IX has been enforced in college athletics, the inevitable result will be academic quotas. This conclusion stems from a court case called *Cohen v. Brown*, which concluded last year. Brown University had built an exemplary women's sports program, beginning in the early 1970s. But in 1991, facing a budget crunch, Brown cut off funding to four of its athletic programs—two men's teams and two women's teams. A group of female athletes sued, arguing that because the student body was 51% female but only 38% of student athletes were female, the university was guilty of discrimination under Title IX. Federal district and appeals courts agreed, and last year the U.S. Supreme Court refused to hear Brown's appeal.

Cohen v. Brown has had a devastating effect on collegiate athletics. Women simply don't turn out for competitive sports at the same rate as men, so schools meet their "gender equity" requirements by scrapping men's teams. Colleges have shut down hundreds of male sports. UCLA dropped its men's swimming program, which had produced 22 Olympic competitors. Boston University ended its 91-year-old Division I football program last year. Thirty-one colleges and universities dropped their men's golf teams in 1994-96, and 24 did away with men's wrestling during the same period. Overall, the number of men playing sports has declined by 10% during the past five years in institutions that belong to the National College Athletic Association.

At the time of the *Cohen v. Brown* trial, Richard Epstein of the University of Chicago Law School warned that if the same principles were applied to academics, "Title IX would be read to require a rough proportion of men and women in engineering and science on the one hand, and art and literature on the other, even though most certainly far more men are engaged in the former activities, and far more women students are engaged in the latter."

That appears to be Mr. Clinton's intention. He boasted at the White House ceremony that his administration has already "stepped up enforcement" of Title IX in areas such as "access to advanced math and science programs." This job has been undertaken by the Department of Education's Office for Civil Rights, headed by Norma Cantu, one of the country's most ardent advocates of sex and race quotas. Last year, the office investigated more than 30 school districts that have an "underrepresentation" of girls in advanced math and science classes and in gifted programs.

What is most amazing about all this is that Title IX itself clearly notes that schools are not required to "grant preferential treatment" to women "on account of an imbalance which may exist" between men and women. The Congress members who voted for Title IX in 1972 had already seen the original Civil Rights Act transformed into a quota machine, and they meant to declare emphatically that Title IX should not be used in this way.

"Title IX would be read to require a rough proportion of men and women in engineering and science on the one hand, and art and literature on the other," warned one scholar. That appears to be Mr. Clinton's intention.

Those good intentions, however, lasted only seven years. In 1979, the Carter administration's Department of Health, Education and Welfare issued a policy interpretation that replaced the old standard of equal opportunity with a new requirement of equal outcomes. And now, 20 years on, the Clinton administration is determined to bend the law even further and demand equal outcomes in every educational program that receives so much as a single federal dollar.

To understand how breathtakingly sweeping an agenda this is, recall that the federal government funds education in many places other than traditional classrooms. The House Education Committee reports that 40 federal departments, commissions and agencies dole out more than $96 billion in annual education funding, which goes to museums, state and local governments, and private businesses as well as to schools, colleges and universities.

On top of that is the money spent on training programs conducted by the federal government itself: schools operated by the Department of Defense and the Bureau of Indian Affairs, and law enforcement training conducted by the FBI. Every one of these activities, whether directly or indirectly subsidized by government, will now come under scrutiny for evidence not of sex discrimination but of sex imbalance. Too many men in gunnery school? Too few men getting day-care training from Indian Affairs? You've got a federal case.

This is too vast an empire even for Norma Cantu to rule. So new regulations being drafted by the Department of Justice will extend to every federal department and agency the power to conduct Title IX investigations and random compliance reviews of their own.

Perhaps most troubling is the possibility that Title IX will affect government funding of medical and scientific research. The National Science Foundation gives out more than $109 million to undergraduate science, engineering and mathematics programs each year. Should that money be cut back to ensure that no more men than women become scientists and technologists? What would happen to the study of disease if the National Institutes of Health, which grant more than $200 million in funding to postsecondary schools, were told to allocate its budgets by sex? And the Department of Health and Human Services doles out more than $70 million in training nurses each year. Is it prepared to cut back on that training unless half those nurses are men?

Though the Justice Department has yet to make the new Title IX regulations public—or even share them with Congress—there are ominous signs of what their final form might take. In December, the Department of Education ratcheted up its regulatory commitment to quotas, notifying some universities that "exact proportionality" would now be required when awarding financial assistance to female athletes. Previously, schools had attempted to achieve "substantial proportionality" by bringing the proportion of their scholarship-assisted female athletes within five percentage points of the total proportion of female athletes. That same month, President Clinton appointed Bill Lann Lee acting assistant attorney general for civil rights. Mr. Lee is a longtime advocate of race and sex quotas, and it will be under Mr. Lee's authority that the final Title IX regulations are issued.

The few congressmen who are paying any attention to the issue are muttering that it would behoove the Justice Department to check with Congress before issuing any new Title IX regulations. If not, they warn, Congress has the authority to conduct hearings on proposed regulations and ultimately to block them if they don't reflect the intent of the statute. Since the statute explicitly forbids quotas, Congress's authority is clear and ample.

Wave of Success

But don't hold your breath. Though its original meaning has been distorted and its day-to-day effects are destructive, Title IX is riding an unprecedented wave of commercial and political success. When the Women's National Basketball Association debuted last year, the league and its corporate sponsors—behemoths like Coca-Cola, Nike and American Express—festooned stadiums with banners that read: "Thanks Title IX." The law has accumulated a constituency of powerful special-interest elites willing to brand any politician "sexist" who disagrees with their by-the-numbers vision of sexual equality.

Will a Republican Party terrified of the "gender gap" really stand fast as sex quotas move from the playing field to the classroom? Michael Williams, who held Ms. Cantu's position in the Bush administration, sadly observes that the quota advocates "won the sports battle." As things stand, they look likely to win the battle for the classroom and the research lab, too.

Ms. Gavora is policy director to former Tennessee Gov. Lamar Alexander. This article is adapted from The Women's Quarterly.

The Chronicle of Higher Education, **June 5, 1998**

CUNY's 4-Year Colleges Ordered to Phase Out Remedial Education

University officials say the controversial plan could halve new enrollments

By PATRICK HEALY

NEW YORK

Trustees of the City University of New York voted last week to phase out most remedial education in the system's 11 four-year colleges beginning in September 1999, transforming CUNY's historic commitment to open admissions.

After two hours of bitter debate and interruptions by student and faculty protesters, the Board of Trustees voted 9 to 6 for a rollback plan that was pushed by Mayor Rudolph W. Giuliani and New York Gov. George E. Pataki, both Republicans.

Under the new policy, applicants who fail one or more university tests in mathematics, reading, or writing will have to successfully complete a free summer program, or pass remedial classes at a CUNY community college or elsewhere, before being admitted to a four-year college. Last year, 13,000 incoming students at the four-year colleges, or about 50 per cent of the total, required some remediation.

Unlike some previous proposals by the trustees, this one left remedial education intact at CUNY's six community colleges -- though CUNY officials said limits may be placed on those campuses down the road.

Architects of the new policy said it would produce higher academic standards and a better learning environment for incoming freshmen. "It doesn't help the students if they have to take high-school work in college, at the same time they take college work," said Herman Badillo, the board's vice-chairman.
But critics said the vote marked a turning point in the history of CUNY, a public university of 200,000 students that is widely known for its open-admissions policy for the city's high-school graduates. While the senior colleges have adopted some entrance criteria in the past two decades, the concept of open admissions has come to symbolize the university's mission of offering higher education to immigrants, the poor, and minority students.

More broadly, many educators saw last week's vote as part of a trend of transferring remedial education from universities to community colleges -- where open admissions at CUNY will remain in effect -- and limiting access to public colleges for minority and disadvantaged students.

"This is an absolutely preposterous and very poor decision," said Albert H. Bowker, who was chancellor of CUNY when it instituted open admissions, in 1970. "If it's true that people graduate from high school and need remediation, why blame the students or the colleges?"

The effects of the policy change are hard to predict. CUNY officials hope that more underprepared students will attend the summer programs, as about 7,400 incoming students -- or 28 per cent -- do now. But no one knows if that will come to pass, or if the financial and teaching resources will be available for a massive expansion of those programs.

If the summer programs do not grow, CUNY estimates, up to 12,000 freshmen -- or close to half of the new baccalaureate-degree students who entered the senior colleges last fall -- would be excluded from a senior college until they complete remedial courses elsewhere. Roughly two-thirds of the students would be Asian, black, or Hispanic, according to a report that CUNY officials prepared for the board.

After factoring in the savings that would come with a reduction in students, CUNY stands to lose about $18-million in tuition once the plan is phased in. Privately, some officials foresee enrollment declines and ensuing cuts in state aid that would accumulate to a loss of $50-million or more.

"We don't know what the consequences will be -- what the racial consequences will be, what the social consequences will be, what the educational consequences will be," said the Rev. Michael C. Crimmins, a Pataki appointee who opposed the plan. "This is simply too much, too soon."

Several trustees who supported the change said the new policy would not cut enrollments as much as CUNY administrators have suggested. Mr. Badillo, the board's vice-chairman, charged that administrators had given the data to reporters in hopes of "torpedoing" the policy.

"They were playing the race card, and it was an outrageous thing to do," he said in an interview. CUNY administrators "used every tactic possible to prevent the vote and create the most destructive atmosphere that could be presented," he said.

Christoph M. Kimmich, CUNY's interim chancellor, said the enrollment estimates were provided in response to requests from trustees. "There will be a considerable impact on students admitted to the senior colleges," he said in an interview. "If figures like that are inconvenient, it's certainly not the fault of the messengers."

The argument over the numbers was one of many disputes that arose over the policy change at the trustees' meeting last week.

One board member, George J. Rios, said the plan sounded a "realistic warning bell" that students must be better prepared, and that "we as educators will no longer tolerate mediocrity and failed opportunity."

But others argued that the policy would elevate CUNY's placement tests in math, reading, and writing to the level of admissions criteria, which they were not designed to be. (Administrators expect to overhaul the tests by 1999.) Critics also charged that Mayor Giuliani and Governor Pataki had interfered with the board's decision-making process by leaning on trustees to support the remedial curbs, rather than allowing them to "vote their conscience."

"This is radical surgery on the mission and role of the City University of New York, and the first step in a plot to downsize the university that has been picked up by radical conservatives," said James Murphy, an appointee of former Gov. Mario M. Cuomo, a Democrat.

All five Giuliani appointees on the 17-member board supported the plan, with Richard B. Stone, a Columbia University law professor, casting the swing vote after sending mixed signals about his position. Nine votes were required to pass the policy; one trustee was absent, and the faculty representative does not have a vote.

"I would have preferred, perhaps, a true comprehensive plan," Mr. Stone said. "But I concluded, on the basis of very extensive discussions with other trustees, with governing authorities, and with many other people, that this was not to be -- that the moment had indeed arrived to take a dramatic first step."

Mr. Stone said the Mayor's office and other trustees had assured him that "the goal isn't to shrink remedial education but to relocate it" at the six community colleges or in the hands of a private provider. He was also pleased that the changes would not apply to students who speak English as a second language and who received a high-school education abroad.

Anne A. Paolucci, chairwoman of the board and a proponent of the new policy, said she wanted more language-immersion programs, as well as new "strategies" to help applicants who are not deemed ready for college-level work.

"We need more remediation, not less, but the venue is different," said Ms. Paolucci, who was appointed by Mr. Pataki.

The plan will take effect in September 1999 at Baruch, Brooklyn, Hunter, and Queens Colleges; in 2000 at City, John Jay, Lehman, and New York City Technical Colleges and the College of Staten Island; and in 2001 at Medgar Evers and York Colleges.

The trustees' decision pleased Mr. Giuliani. "Open enrollment has been a big, big failure," he said before the vote. "We should stop playing make-believe. We have a lot of people at CUNY who were given high-school diplomas that aren't worth the paper they're written on."

Early in the board's debate, Ms. Paolucci ejected most members of the audience after a handful of CUNY students and faculty members began chanting "Stop the racism," "Stop the bastards," and "Stop the war on CUNY."

Later, 14 people were arrested -- including state Assemblyman Edward C. Sullivan, chairman of the Assembly's Higher Education Committee -- and given summonses for disorderly conduct when they would not move from a street outside CUNY headquarters here, said New York City Police Capt. Richard Loehmann.

The trustees also directed CUNY administrators to present a plan to carry out the new policy by September. Louise Mirrer, CUNY's vice-chancellor for academic affairs, said she would focus on fine-tuning the summer programs by summer 1999.

"The first line of defense for students' needs are now the summer immersion programs," she said. "We'll need additional resources, and I'd front-load all of it now into summer programs."

***AAHE Bulletin,* May 1998**

Not-So-Distant Competitors

How New Providers Are Remaking the Postsecondary Marketplace

by Ted Marchese

Quite suddenly, in just two or three years, American higher education has come face-to-face with an explosive array of new competitors. On campus, the surest conversation-stopper today is "University of Phoenix." To some academics, Phoenix looks like the first-sighted tip of an iceberg. But it probably won't be the one that sinks whole ships. Bigger bergs are forming. Charting them is difficult. To find these "new providers," we sought them out on the Web. Here's what we found.

The Convenience Market

By one light, Phoenix is just the most aggressive manifestation of a larger, branch-office trend that's at least a decade old. Dozens of private and regional-public colleges, for example, now offer degree programs in the Washington, DC, area. Wisconsin recently counted more than 100 out-of-state degree providers within its borders; there are 37 in Milwaukee alone. Last month I passed a busy intersection in Lake County, Illinois, where a former gas station had become a branch campus of Missouri's Columbia College. In the convenience end of the market, everybody goes after the other guy's lunch.

What's different about Phoenix is that it is explicitly for-profit, well capitalized, idea-driven, and national in ambition. From next to nothing a handful of years ago, Phoenix suddenly has 48,000 degree-credit students at 57 learning centers in 12 states. Its parent, the Apollo Group, recently reported quarterly profits of $12.8 million (before taxes) on sales of $86.5 million. Apollo also owns the College for Financial Planning (22,000 non-credit students), Western International University (1,800 students), and an Institute for Professional Development that provides contract services for "program development and management" at 19 colleges. Once-tiny Cardinal Stritch has parlayed the Phoenix formula into an enrollment of 5,300 students. Apollo's Phoenix division now has an online campus that offers computer-mediated distance education programs enrolling 3,750 students (up 53% from last year). Phoenix's phenomenal growth has been largely driven by niche programs at the BA-completion and master's-degree levels, especially in business, IT, and teacher education. It taps new and "left behind" markets: 97% of its students are adults who started earlier elsewhere; 57% are women, 37% minority.

At the undergraduate level, two long-established proprietary competitors have expanded aggressively. Chicago's

DeVry Institute of Technology now has 15 campuses in the United States and Canada enrolling 48,000 students in business and technical programs; DeVry owns the well-regarded Keller Graduate School of Management (4,700 students). Indianapolis-based ITT Educational Services counts 25,800 students in its 62 institutes.

In the not-for-profit sector, dozens of existing universities and colleges have developed remote-site strategies. St. Louis-based Webster University now boasts 15,000 students in 64 U.S. locations plus six overseas. Chapman, National, Park, RIT, Ottawa, and Central Michigan also teach afar. The Maricopa district's Rio Salado Community College operates at 129 locations. The University of Maryland's University College teaches 35,000 students at hundreds of sites; it holds commencement ceremonies in College Park, Heidelberg, Tokyo, Okinawa, Seoul, Schwäbisch Gmünd, Irkutsk, and Vladivostok.

Courses at a Distance

If not "Phoenix," the scare words of choice are "Western Governors University." Again, though, distance education is not a new phenomenon: American universities offered correspondence courses a century ago. In 1995, according to a "flash estimate" released this spring by the U.S. Department of Education, fully a third of all institutions offered distance education courses, and another quarter planned to. But the way the field is moving, 1995 is distance education's olden days. WGU's founding back in 1996 created quite a stir, but it will fight for attention when it actually opens next month. Nimble competitors have already come to market.

In 1995, according to a "flash estimate" released this spring by the U.S. Department of Education, fully a third of all institutions offered distance education courses, and another quarter planned to. But the way the field is moving, 1995 is distance education's olden days.

WGU's ambition, though, will be second to none. Its founders include 17 governors; its 14 "business partners" include IBM, Sun, AT&T, KPMG, Cisco, 3COM, Microsoft, and International Thomson. WGU won't employ teaching faculty, develop courses, or deal in credit hours: its online academic content will come from a range of qualifying providers (colleges or businesses, here or abroad), and all degrees will be competency-based. WGU's aim is to be the broker of choice within an academic common market that it helps create. Its "founding philosophies" are "partnerships" and "competition." Its business plan envisions 95,000 students by early next century . . . not just from the West (Indiana joined up in April). As courses are added from national universities, corporations, and publishers, Utah governor Mike Leavitt foresees WGU becoming the "New York Stock Exchange of technology-delivered courses."

A lot of other people have had variants of the same idea. California opted out of the WGU compact to create its own, more modest California Virtual University; CVU's catalog already lists 700 courses from 81 public and private institutions. SREB's Southern Regional Electronic Campus spans 15 participating states and aims to create a marketplace of courses offered by TV, the Internet, and otherwise; its online catalog now lists 100 mostly Web-based courses from 42 colleges. Colorado's community college system offers associate's degrees in business entirely over the Internet (for students anywhere) and coursework tailored for WGU; it got there fast by working with Denver-based Real Education, a firm that promises "to get your university online in 60 days." The Fort Collins-based National Technological University, a 14-year-old nonprofit, uses satellites to beam engineering coursework from 50 major universities to clients worldwide.

Several states — Georgia, Missouri, Indiana, Oklahoma, Minnesota, Utah, Virginia — are looking to gear up earlier investments in IT infrastructure for distance learning capability. The University of Wisconsin's system office partnered with Lotus to put together a Learning Innovation Center in Madison, with for-profit and not-for-profit arms, to vend UW courses and degrees worldwide; 565 courses are available. The University of Hawaii uses two-way video, cable, satellite, and the Internet to deliver 13 full degree programs to citizens statewide. The University of Nebraska chartered a for-profit entity to parlay its long history in distance learning into a worldwide operation. Penn State expects big things from its World Campus.

Individual schools are also making their moves. Two institutions with long histories of high-end continuing education, NYU and Boston University, have corporate partners that have helped them win impressive training contracts. Lansing Community College now has its own virtual college; SUNY's Empire State enrolls more than 6,000 students; Duke now offers a top-end Global Executive MBA; by plan, a fourth of all courses at Florida's new Gulf Coast University will be taken online. Established graduate-level players such as Walden, Fielding, Nova, the New School, and Arthur D. Little are looking to expand. Stanford's

Office of Educational Ventures hopes to capitalize on the university's 30-year history of distance learning; UCLA and corporate partners launched the for-profit Home Education Network; UC-Berkeley's partner for online offerings will be UOL Publishing.

The Alfred P. Sloan Foundation has put $15 million into some 40 campus projects, looking for breakthroughs in access, pedagogy, and outcomes via asynchronous learning networks.

More Competitors

To Wall Street and entrepreneurs-at-large, the postsecondary education and training market looks huge and ripe for the picking . . . an "addressable market opportunity at the dawn of a new paradigm," in the breathless words of Morgan Stanley Dean Witter. In dollar terms, close to $300 billion is spent a year on the function, $635 billion if grades P-12 are added in. Several Wall Street houses have set up "education industry" practices to attract investors. A report from NationsBanc Montgomery Securities characterizes the industry with words such as "inefficient," "cottage industry," "low tech," and "lack of professional management." It claims $1.7 billion has been raised on Wall Street since 1996 to finance new competitive ventures.

Alternative and distance providers claim just 2% of the postsecondary market today, but a combination of pent-up demand, changes in the tax law, and today's E-commerce boom could quickly balloon that market share by a factor of 10 . . . at which point larger transformations could kick in. As unthinkable as this might seem to established higher education, Wall Street offers reminders that aggressive competitors cut the banking establishment's share of household financial assets from 90% in 1980 to 55% today.

Baltimore's Sylvan Learning Systems (1-800-EDUCATE), a Wall Street darling, aims to be the world's "leading provider of educational services to families, schools, and industry." Its five business areas are K-16 tutoring (700 sites), contracted services to schools, computer-based testing (Prometric), adult professional education, and English-language instruction around the world. In March, Sylvan and partner MCI spun off their Caliber Learning Network; Caliber successfully brought an $80 million initial public offering to market May 5th that will help build out its network beyond the present 48 shopping malls and business centers. Caliber's business goal is to offer brand-name professional education nationwide. It already has deals with Johns Hopkins (health) and Wharton (business) and agreements with other "medallions" (Berkeley, MIT, Georgetown) to offer brand-name courseware and degrees in other fields . . . at a mall near you.

Sylvan's revenues rose 35% last year, to $246.2 million. Total revenues for the quarter ending December 31, 1997, jumped 51%; the company reported net income of $11.8 million for that quarter on sales of $78.2 million. It is growth — and margins — like this that has investors chomping at the bit. ETS, with its ever-closer ties to Prometric, has taken a 1.4% ownership position in Sylvan, worth $22 million.

Jones Education Company (JEC), the brainchild of cable entrepreneur Glenn Jones ("Let's get the cost of real estate out of education!"), offers instruction via cable (Knowledge TV), courses and degrees from existing universities "anywhere, anytime" (College Connection), and self-paced video and CD-ROM learning products (Knowledge Store). JEC's College Connection online catalog offers six certificate and 11 degree programs from 14 partner universities, including Regis and George Washington Universities. The nonprofit Virtual Online University offers instruction from K through 16; its Internet-based Athena University uses MOO technology to engage students in curricula spanning eight academic divisions, each headed by a dean. The Electronic University Network, started in 1983 and a feature of America Online since 1992, has launched the World Learning Network, whose "learning community" software aims to end "the isolation of the distant learner." In January it was acquired by Santa Barbara-based Durand Communications.

Specialty for-profit higher education companies include Fairfax, VA-based Computer Learning Centers (computer, IT training; 1997 sales of $64 million, 1998 of $97 million); Pittsburgh's Education Management Corp. (arts, culinary; $183 million); and Educational Medical of Rosewell, GA ($49 million). CLC's high-flying stock plunged 46% in March when Illinois sued the firm for false claims of job placement. In early May, Illinois reinstated CLC's permission to operate.

A recurring problem for proprietary providers like these is that employer reimbursement often hinges on the award of college credit. As an example of how that problem is solved, students taking Microsoft or Novell certification courses — which can cost more than $10,000 — in any of 100 authorized ITCAP centers around the country get the credits they need through Tucson's Pima County Community College.

Want to learn HTML? Learn It Online, a new service from publisher Ziff-Davis, offers the course you need, with chat group, for $29.95.

A host of new providers hope to be the broker of choice for the flood of courseware hitting the Web. CASO's Internet University, essentially an indexing service, points the way to 2,440 courses. World Lecture Hall, at the University of Texas, lists thousands of courses in 95 disciplines. The Global Network Academy, a Texas nonprofit, lists 250 providers, 770 programs, and 10,000 online courses. Extensive listings also exist on websites at the Universities of North Carolina and Houston ("archive.edu"). Virtual University Enterprises (acquired by National Computing Systems) concentrates on listing corporate education programs, worldwide. A Web-based consumer's guide to distance education is maintained by the Western Cooperative for Educational Telecommunications.

More Niches

One of the most closely watched start-ups is the Michigan Virtual Automotive College (MVAC), a creation of the state of Michigan, the Big Three automakers, the United Auto Workers, and the state's two flagships, Michigan and Michigan State. Its president is former Michigan president Jim Duderstadt; MSU president Peter McPherson chairs the executive committee. MVAC's mission is to become the essential hub for auto industry education and training — to offer the best courses from any provider anywhere to corporate employees, be they on assembly lines, at drafting boards, or in executive suites. If engineers need the latest course in computer-aided design, MVAC can locate best experts in the subject, design the course, custom deliver it on-site or elsewhere, evaluate and continuously improve it . . . and ultimately vend it to the 27 major auto companies and 5 million auto industry workers worldwide. MVAC's watchwords include *customer-driven, competency-based,* and *standards for delivery.* In its first 16 months of operation, it has put together some 115 courses with professors or units from 27 universities (including Phoenix); 300 students are now enrolled, 2,000 set for fall. When suppliers, dealers, repair shops, and retail outlets are taken as part of the auto industry, enrollment projections soar to six and seven figures.

The essential idea behind MVAC — that an industry group can combine to produce its own education enterprise, entry-level through lifelong learning, and cease reliance on a "cottage industry" of existing campuses — has strong appeal among corporate execs, especially where dissatisfaction with traditional higher education is high. In the face of such a combine (and such course quality), observers feel, few colleges could maintain competitive offerings, on campus or off. Already the money has come together for like-minded start-ups in plastics, furniture, and tourism. Could health care, teacher education, accounting, or information technology be next?

> ***The essential idea behind MVAC — that an industry group can combine to produce its own education enterprise, entry-level through lifelong learning, and cease reliance on a "cottage industry" of existing campuses — has strong appeal among corporate execs, especially where dissatisfaction with traditional higher education is high.***

An Industry Forms

With all the interest in creating online instructional materials, a new industry has emerged to provide the necessary consulting, marketing, and tools. Any recent *Chronicle* carries prominent display ads from would-be vendors: Cisco Systems, SCT, Collegis, Lotus, and the like, plus repeated "executive briefings" in 24 cities around the country from a Microsoft-Simon & Schuster-Real Education combine.

The IBM Global Campus offers a sophisticated set of interrelated tools and services for distributed learning environments and distance education. Products from IBM's Lotus division, including Notes and LearningSpace, promise enhanced forms of distance learning. Some 30 campuses, including the Wisconsin and California State University systems, use Global Campus services. SCT claims 1,100 collegiate customers; last fall it partnered with Asymetrix to offer a "total solution" for online learning. Microsoft teams with San Francisco's Convene International to provide an Exchange Server-based distance learning system for universities and businesses; Phoenix, Golden Gate, and UCLA Extension are among its customers. On April 29th, Educom's Instructional Management Systems project — a consortium of 29 software makers and universities — released technical standards that will allow learning materials and distance education systems from different vendors to "interoperate."

The trade journals are full of ads, too, for authoring software and templates that help individual professors and IT centers put courses on the Web. At a more elaborate level of presentation, MVAC officials budget $10,000-$12,000 per instructional hour to prepare the courses they offer. At a higher level still, for mass-market courses put together by an Andersen Consulting, for example, the "design and build" budget typically runs $80,000 per class hour . . . so a three-credit, 45-clock-hour course might have a development and marketing budget of $4 million. Who might invest in such a course? Publishers such as International Thomson, AWL, McGraw-Hill, John Wiley, and Simon & Schuster, who are angling to become content providers for Web-based courseware. One unit of an Ivy League university is looking toward Wall Street for the $15 million in start-up funds it would take to put its core courses online competitively.

Another part of the emergent industry looks to provide cost-effective delivery channels for distance education. All the major telecommunication companies are in the business. Connecticut-based Campus Televideo and Toner Cable claim to serve 85 universities nationwide. Want to broadcast abroad? Washington-based World Space is creating a global satellite-digital radio network . . . a medium of choice for reaching Third World learners.

Academic leaders are keeping an eye on industry ventures springing up in the K-12 arena. Knowledge Universe, for example, founded by the Milken brothers and Oracle's Larry Ellison, is a $600 million venture that's been snapping up software, IT-training, and consulting businesses. Last October it signed a deal with cable giant TCI to position itself as an online content provider, potentially to include a virtual university. In March, "global multiple-media publisher" Harcourt General hired Massachusetts's high-profile education commissioner Robert Antonucci to head its ICS Learning Systems division, which serves 400,000 students worldwide. A NationsBanc Montgomery Securities publication describes at least three dozen well-financed K-12 competitors (labeled "education management organizations," "specialty service providers," and "content providers"), more than a few of which could become postsecondary players.

Not to be overlooked, too, is the explosion of distance learning programs within industry. It already spends $58 billion a year on employee training and development and sees distance technologies as a way to save time and cut costs (by 15% to 50%); an estimated 85% of the Fortune 500 now deploy some form of remote training. Health giant Kaiser Permanente is doubling its distance learning sites from 150 to 300, eating into "university business" by offering bachelor's and master's degrees for nurses and continuing education for physicians. MetLife, on the other hand, teamed with Drexel to bring its employees a master's degree in information systems.

How big is this new industry overall? TeleCon East is an annual trade show cosponsored by the United States Distance Learning Association and GE Spacenet. In 1994, its 65 exhibits drew 1,386 attendees; in 1997, 200 exhibits drew 6,595 viewers; 1998 attendance will surpass 10,000.

Competitors From Abroad?

The developments recounted here are hardly confined to the United States. Most of the Australian universities now have for-profit enterprises to market their courses and degrees, at home and abroad. A quick tour of the Web turns up virtual universities from Peru to Malaysia. Britain's much-admired, 168,000-student Open University, already a major player in Eastern Europe and the Far East, will enter the U.S. market in partnership with domestic universities (so far Florida State, CSU campuses, and WGU); it soon will announce the Open University of the United States, a nonprofit entity that will incorporate in Delaware and seek Middle States accreditation.

To track and sort through the maze of regulatory and quality issues raised by the worldwide spread of distance offerings, a Global Alliance for Transnational Education has formed. Australia's Monash University and United States-based International University recently completed GATE's "certification" process.

In Canada, with its long history of distance education, several universities are deeply into extending their reach, among them Simon Fraser, UBC, Athabasca, Laval, and Cape Breton. Several universities are partners in Theme Seven, an infrastructure that provides teacher professional development in the use of information technologies . . . a need that hardly stops at the border. On April 16th, TVOntario, which sells educational programming in 136 countries, signed a deal with Israel's Arel Communications and Software to provide satellite-based interactive classrooms at 400 sites across the province. (Arel has opened an office in Atlanta to market its Integrated Distance Education and Learning system in the United States.) Canadian presidents (like their U.S. counterparts) fret privately that their existing distance learning initiatives will not be able to withstand well-heeled competitors operating across national borders.

For established colleges and universities, the competitive threat is fourfold. First, all face threats to their continuing education, degree-completion, or extension arm . . . which in more than a few cases is a key financial base for the institution. Second, in the convenience part of the market, less-selective colleges will feel real pressure on their base enrollments at the associate's, bachelor's, and master's levels. Third, most institutions and their faculties will confront difficult, market- and quality-based questions about whether to replace existing, home-grown courses with nationally produced courseware. Fourth, all institutions, Ivies and medallions included, may see their undergraduate franchise eroded as enrolled students appear in the registrar's office with brand-name course credits taken over the Web.

More broadly, an essence of distance learning is that it knows no boundaries of time or place; it is, inherently transnational. A big fear among U.S. university leaders and postsecondary start-ups alike is that — just as happened in banking and health care — major international combines will emerge to quash today's smaller-time competitors. What would the postsecondary marketplace look like if (say) Microsoft, Deutsche Telekom, International Thomson, and the University of California combined to offer UC courses and degrees worldwide? In time, its only competitor could be a combine of like standing and deep pockets: an IBM-Elsevier-NEC-Oxford combine, for example. We shall see. ■

Acknowledgment
AAHE research associate Caitlin Anderson performed searches and provided data for this report.

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Selected Readings on School Reform

Grab Bag

As we reach into our grab bag this summer season, we find a swell collection of odds and ends. Our first two articles have the same moral: unbiased, honest research is hard to come by in education. "The Diogenes Factor," an *Education Week* piece by Herbert Walberg and Rebecca Greenburg, examines a recent study of eleven widely disseminated reform programs. Robert Slavin served as the primary reviewer. He himself developed a reform program, "Success for All," which conveniently emerged as the most effective program. Meanwhile, independent reviews suggest that the program has questionable educational effect.

As David Hoff describes in his *Education Week* article, "Federal Class-Size Reports Do an About-Face," the U.S. Department of Education is not immune to similarly fudging research results. Current DOE class-size reports imply that small student-teacher ratios improve student performance. Under other administrations, the Department's research in this area reached the opposite conclusion. What's going on? Hoff implies that the Department is retrofitting the research to justify the President's demand for more teachers.

In our April edition, we brought you a special "Parents" section. Here we squeeze in another story about moms and dads, Amy Stuart Wells's "For Baby Boomers, A 90's Kind of Sit-In" from *The New York Times Education Life*. Wells calls attention to a growing trend throughout the country—more and more parents are gaining more and more influence in their children's school. The old days, when home and school occupied separate spheres, have given way to an era of "bridging the gap." (To read more about this topic, check out our *Network Note* on the latest MetLife survey of the American teacher.)

We close with a few words on technology in the classroom from the brilliant computer scientist David Gelernter. In his *Time* magazine essay, "No—Learn First, Surf Later," he blasts the Clinton/Gore plan to wire every American classroom to the Internet as "toxic quackery." He argues that at best this should be a peripheral concern of schools, not their foremost objective. The idea that children should master math, science, reading, writing, and history before leaping into cyberspace isn't rocket science—nor computer science. But it is obviously needs repeating.

BRW

Education Week, April 8, 1998

The Diogenes Factor

Why It's Hard To Get an Unbiased View Of Programs Like 'Success for All'

By Herbert J. Walberg and Rebecca C. Greenberg

The federal government and foundations sponsor report after report describing programs said to raise student achievement, particularly that of poor, urban, and minority children. Many articles in scholarly and practitioner journals also describe programs that apparently raise students' test scores.

Yet, the best long-term indicator of achievement, the National Assessment of Educational Progress, shows no consistent upward trends during the past three decades. The latest international achievement comparisons, moreover, show U.S. students ahead in the early school years but falling to the back of the pack by the senior year of high school. The longer they are in school, the further they fall behind the averages of other countries. What explains this paradox of successful programs and failing students?

Despite many reports of success, we find few objective evaluations conducted by independent investigators. Staffs of government agencies and program developers apparently believe their programs work, and usually commission or carry out their own evaluations to prove their point. Consciously or not, their beliefs can strongly affect the design, conduct, and results of evaluations.

Bias can even affect "pure" research results even when politics, jobs, and money are not at issue. To avoid such bias in medical research, for example, investigators use double-blind experiments. Neither patients nor caregivers know which patients get the experimental medicine and which receive placebo pills known to have no physiological effect. This procedure enables the investigators to separate the effect of the drug from the effect of patients' suggestibility or belief in treatment efficacy.

In educational evaluation, placebo effects are usually built in rather than controlled since program developers, administrators, and teachers all know that they are employing a new program and that they are being watched. This, of course, may make programs appear more successful than they would be in normal practice.

Federal support of education programs, moreover, raises powerful pressures. The federal government, for example, has spent more than $100 billion on the Chapter 1/Title I program to raise the achievement of poor children. With such huge amounts of money at stake, program developers, administrators, and evaluators have strong financial interests in showing success. Their jobs, salaries, and perquisites depend on continued funding. What's more, program developers, who have been supported by government and foundations, increasingly are selling their materials and services to schools.

When for-profit firms offer programs to schools, educators remain on guard: Let the buyer beware. Government agencies, foundations, and other not-for-profits are often thought to be superior in knowledge, objectivity, and altruism. They, however, are increasingly driven by monetary and political pressures, which are not necessarily in the public or students' interest. The same government agencies and foundations that fund the programs, for example, hire evaluators, evaluate the programs themselves, or allow program developers to evaluate the programs. Having said the programs would succeed, can agency administrators easily return to Congress or their foundation's governing board to say they were wrong? Are they likely to hire independent-minded evaluators?

The principle of "conflict of interest" is hardly news. Aristotle warned his fellow citizens to consider the source, and the ancient Romans asked who would benefit from proposed conclusions and decisions. What is new is the pervasiveness of what we will call "the Diogenes factor" in program evaluation. According to ancient Athenian lore, Diogenes searched, with a lighted lantern, through daytime

Athens for honesty. Though fabrication may be rare in educational evaluation, we can easily find selective evidence and misleading comparisons, which favor funded programs. These lead to misleading overestimates of program effectiveness.

Consider "Success for All," which provides a noteworthy example of the Diogenes factor in a federally supported program. Though its own developers declare it a huge success, independent evaluators find essentially negative evidence.

In the January 1998 *Phi Delta Kappan*, a chief Success for All developer, Robert Slavin, and his Johns Hopkins University colleague Olatokunbo Fashola, ask which widely disseminated reform programs meet their criteria for achievement. Since Success for All revenues are expected to grow from $15 million to $30 million in the coming year, Mr. Slavin and Ms. Fashola may not be disinterested parties. They nonetheless review Success for All, its extension Roots and Wings, and 11 other programs, including E.D. Hirsch Jr.'s Core Knowledge, Henry Levin's Accelerated Schools, and James P. Comer's School Development Program.

Their evaluation reveals only two programs that meet their achievement criterion—Success for All and Roots and Wings. In accord with this assessment, they devote three full columns of print to their own two programs, and between about a fifth and a full column for the other 11.

Ms. Fashola and Mr. Slavin estimated the numerical effects of Success for All on achievement, the average of which is one of the largest program effects ever reported. It would place Success for All students at the 85th percentile of control-group students. All of their estimates, they say, were above the level they consider educationally significant.

On the other hand, an independent evaluation of Success for All by Elizabeth Jones and Gary and Denise Gottfredson of the University of Maryland showed an average effect of near zero—that is, Success for All students scored about the 50th percentile or the same as matched control groups. In five of 10 comparisons, the Maryland group found that control groups outscored Success for All students. The Maryland group also compiled six estimated effects from other independent evaluations of Success for All. In two cases, Success for All students did better than control groups; in two cases, the differences were not educationally significant; and in two instances, control groups outscored Success for All students.

Success for All's expressed goal is to bring all children to or near grade level by 3rd grade so they may progress normally in the later grades. In another independent evaluation, Richard Venezky of the University of Delaware pointed out: "According to the project's own reports, Success for All has clearly not led to all students' achieving at or near grade level by the end of grade 3, even with only reading and language arts [which Success for All emphasizes] included in the outcomes assessment." Mr. Slavin and Ms. Fashola make no mention of their own negative findings in their *Kappan* report.

Mr. Venezky carried out a Success for All evaluation in Baltimore, where the program originated and should do well. He, nonetheless, concluded that the average Success for All student failed to reach grade-level performance by the end of grade 3. Even with further Success for All instruction, students continued to fall further behind national norms. By the end of 5th grade, they were almost 2.4 years behind.

Thus, the Success for All developers and independent reviewers differ hugely in their estimates of its effectiveness. Any one or all of the following reasons probably account for these differences:

> Federal funds continue to support the promulgation and biased evaluation of failed programs.

1. Success for All insists that 80 percent of the teachers vote to adopt the program in a secret ballot, but such schools are unusual in consensus and determination. Even if matched in socioeconomic status to control schools, they are hardly run-of-the-mill schools, where such consensus is rarely reached.

2. Success for All concentrates on reading, possibly sacrificing math, science, and other subjects. Reading results are misleading estimates of the program's overall effects on the broad range of primary school subjects and skills.

3. Unlike standardized national achievement tests used by independent evaluators, Success for All employs individually administered tests that favor the program and which are subject to biased impressions and scoring by Success for All's own evaluators.

4. In its *Kappan* comparisons with other programs, Success for All cites its own positive effects, not its own negative findings, nor the negative findings of independent evaluations.

The Success for All evaluation story is hardly unique. The poor progress of American students during the school years relative to those in other countries is a national tragedy, sadder still among poor and minority students who tend to fall even further behind. Five independent evaluations of the $7 billion-per-year Chapter 1 program for disadvantaged children showed little achievement difference between program and control groups.

Yet federal funds continue to support the promulgation and biased evaluation of failed programs. This is worse than doing nothing. It wastes vast resources, obscures the problem, and delays productive solutions. Diogenes, lend us your lantern. ■

Education Week, June 10, 1998

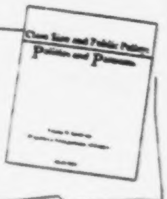
Federal Class-Size Reports Do an About-Face

By David J. Hoff
Washington

Two Views on Class-Size Reduction

Two reports from the Department of Education—one issued in 1988 and the other in 1998—bring differing perspectives to the debate over class-size-reduction initiatives.

From "Class Size and Public Policy: Politics and Panaceas" in 1988:
Evidence to date ... does not generally support a policy of limiting class size in order to raise student achievement or to improve the quality of worklife for teachers; nor does it justify small reductions in pupil/teacher ratios or class size in order to enhance student achievement. Research also fails to support school policies designed to lower class size if these do not first specify which pupils will benefit and how and why they will do so.



Reducing
Class Size:
What Do
We Know?

From "Reducing Class Size: What Do We Know?" in 1998:
Reducing class size to below 20 students leads to higher student achievement. However, class-size reduction represents a considerable commitment of funds, and its implementation can have a sizable impact on the availability of qualified teachers. ... There is more than one way to implement class-size reduction, and more than one way to teach in a smaller class. Depending on how it is done, the benefits of class-size reduction will be larger or smaller.

SOURCE: Department of Education

Just last month, the Department of Education released a report stating that the "consensus of research indicates that class-size reduction in the early grades leads to higher student achievement."

Ten years earlier, the same department—under different leadership—wrote that "the cost of reducing average class size by even a few students is very large and, of itself, the measure is not likely to enhance school outcomes."

The divergent messages raise the question of whether the public can rely on the federal agency to provide objective reports reflecting current debates in education research. Critics say the public can't.

The latest report "is a political document to backfill a policy that [the Clinton administration] proposed, but [that] doesn't have much support," contended Eric A. Hanushek, a professor of economics and public policy at the University of Rochester and a persistent critic of class-size-reduction policies.

Marshall S. Smith, the acting deputy secretary of education, countered that research in the past decade has documented successful experiments with class-size reduction and that the new report simply reflects those findings.

Others say the most important factor in any Education Department report is who's in charge of the agency. In 1988, the department was part of a Republican administration that actively sought to curtail federal education spending. Now, it's under the control of Democrats who are pushing President Clinton's plans to spend $12 billion subsidizing the salaries of 100,000 new teachers over the next seven years.

Some skeptics of the positive impact of class-size reduction are not disturbed by the Education Department's new study.

Releasing such reports "is a very appropriate thing for [the department] to do," said Douglas E. Mitchell, an education professor at the University of California, Riverside, who is not convinced that class-size reduction spurs student achievement. "It's in the nature of things that overdrawn statements will be made. I don't expect them to publish something that's so bland that it doesn't support anything."

Research Tilt

Democrats complained in the late 1980s that the department, under President Reagan, tilted its research to reflect the conservative agenda of then-Secretary of Education William J. Bennett and his assistant secretary for research, Chester E. Finn Jr. Saying it wanted to take politics out of research, the Democrat-led Congress in 1994 created a nonpartisan policy board to oversee the department's office of educational research and improvement.

Since the latest class-size report includes no original research, it is not a product of the OERI. Instead, the synthesis of recent reports was published and distributed by the department's leadership, spurring questions about its credibility.

Indeed, the department put out the most recent report six days before Secretary of Education Richard W. Riley held a May 14 press conference with congressional Democrats heralding the formal introduction of legislation to enact the president's proposal. Mr. Riley's aides distributed the 17-page report called "Reducing Class Size: What Do We Know?" to members of the press.

Despite the report's unambiguous conclusion, Mr. Hanushek said, it cites several studies that differ from its thesis. But the contrary studies—including one of Mr. Hanushek's—are raised and then discredited by other reports that the department cites that favor class-size reduction. The rebuttals to pro-class-size-reduction research raised by Mr. Hanushek and others aren't mentioned in the department report.

Mr. Smith, the department's No. 2 official, said that the May 8 report is a fair sample of what researchers have discovered in the past 10 years. The most significant evidence supporting President Clinton's proposal, he said, was gathered in Tennessee's Project STAR. The longitudinal study has found students' test scores increased after being in small K-3 classes. The benefits tended to stay with them, later studies have found. *(See Education Week, July 12, 1995.)*

Extensive reviews of Project STAR and separate studies have supported the belief that class-size reduction benefits students, Mr. Smith said.

"They've all seem to come out in the same direction ... suggesting that there's something there," he said. "Had that research come out a different way, the report would have been put out" with those details in it.

Mr. Hanushek and other critics remain unconvinced.

"Project STAR is unable to say what it is teachers did differently in the small classes," said Tommy M. Tomlinson, who wrote the 1988 federal report and worked at the OERI until he retired in 1994. "It's sort of magic. They don't know what they did differently" and act as if the size of class was the only variable, he added.

If lowering student-teacher ratios does improve student achievement, the benefits may not be significant enough to justify the extensive costs, Mr. Tomlinson's report concluded.

Ironically, Mr. Tomlinson's report—"Class Size and Public Policy: Politics and Panaceas"—listed Mr. Smith as one of several people who reviewed portions of it. In a telephone interview last week, Mr. Tomlinson recalled one exchange of letters between the two, but said Mr. Smith never said he agreed with the report's conclusion.

For his part, Mr. Smith said he did not remember reviewing the 1988 report.

Questionable Impact

Washington insiders say decisionmakers are rarely swayed when a federal agency releases a report supporting one of its own initiatives. Independent research has a much greater impact on congressional debate, according to Christopher T. Cross, the president of the Washington-based Council for Basic Education and a former assistant secretary for research in the Bush administration.

So far, the department's new class-size-reduction report has had little impact. Shortly after its release, Mr. Clinton agreed to support a Senate tobacco bill that does not include the money for class-size reduction, as the president proposed.

Mr. Smith said the administration now is hoping to attach its proposal to a tax bill it will push Congress to pass this year.

New York Times Education Life, **April 5, 1998**

For Baby Boomers, A 90's Kind of Sit-In

Parents are occupying the nation's classrooms with a new set of demands: a say in how their children's schools are run.

BY AMY STUART WELLS

SANTA MONICA, CALIF.

FROM THE MOMENT SHE ARRIVES AT THE Santa Monica Alternative School House at 8 A.M., the principal, Viki Montera, is working the courtyard and classrooms. She spends about two and a half hours each morning listening to parents' ideas.

More parents show up with more opinions at lunchtime. Another crowd arrives after school, and yet another in the evenings, when parent-led committees meet at this Los Angeles suburb's public school of choice, known by its acronym, Smash.

Some parents want to confer with Ms. Montera on typical volunteer issues like the logistics of the bagel sale or book fair. But others want to advise her on the type of decisions traditionally left to educators, like whether students should be separated into fast and slow reading groups or if third graders should learn multiplication tables.

"I feel like I am trying to balance between the staff's perspective and the parents' perspective and hear both sides and try to urge both sides to see a different point of view," said Ms. Montera, who was hired this year to create a better working relationship between staff and parents.

Parental input at the kindergarten-through-eighth-grade school, founded in 1973 by parents looking for a more progressive approach to education (and supported by parent activists like Jane Fonda), is an extreme example of a larger trend: the changing relationship between parents and schools. Parents and educators agree that today's mothers and fathers are far more likely than the generation before them to question teachers' authority and demand a voice in decisions that their own parents would have considered none of their business.

"Parents have been much more vocal and more demanding in their relations with the schools," said Annette Lareau, an associate professor of sociology at Temple University, who studies parent and school interaction. "The boundaries between professional educators and parents have become more blurred."

In response, Federal, state and local legislators across the country have passed policies that encourage or even mandate parent involvement in decision-making. In 1994, Congress added parent involvement as one of the eight national education goals in its Goals 2,000 legislation, which provides Federal financing to states to accomplish these ends. In the last 15 years, 25 states have enacted 38 pieces of legislation increasing parents' role in schools.

This more democratic approach can create tensions between schools and parents, and between parents who don't share the same ideas, as schools struggle to find the right balance between parental voices and teachers' need to control classrooms and curriculums.

Today's new role for parents is a significant shift. Until this generation of parents, the trend was in the other direction, as the public educational system expanded to serve more students and teachers, and administrators were required to have more professional training. Teachers gained greater authority and discretion over pedagogical decisions, from how to teach reading to whether to include sex education, putting parents in a supportive, secondary role in the education of their children.

But now the graduates of this same system are rewriting the rules, placing themselves as parents at the center of the decision-making process.

This movement, primarily in middle-class communities where parents wield some political influence, can be partly attributed to the baby-boom generation, which has parented most school-age children over the last 20 years. Questioning teachers' decisions and practices is in keeping with their impact on other institutions.

"It's harder for schools with this group of parents," said Donna Heider-Pass, whose only child, now a 7-year-old Smash student, was born when she was 40. "And on the parents' side, it is not an easy relationship either, because most of us grew up in a time when the teacher was the boss, and now we are all challenging that role and not sure how that will be played out."

Ms. Heider-Pass's mother, who had eight children, was only peripherally involved in their schools. Ms. Heider-Pass, who serves on a committee that sets admissions standards at Smash, looks at the parenting experience differently. "I wanted to be involved every step of the way," she said.

The changing attitude may also be related to parents' higher levels of education. According to the Census Bureau, adults in their late 20's to late 40's — those more likely to have school-age children — are almost twice as likely to have a bachelor's degree as those 65 and older.

Educated parents, experts say, are far more critical of teachers and bolder about marching into schools to complain.

According to Joyce L. Epstein, a parent involvement specialist at Johns Hopkins University, the growth in college-educated women means that mothers, even working ones with less time, are not about to relinquish the supervision, care and education of their children to teachers at a comparable educational level. And they are anxious that their children receive the type of instruction that will prepare them to compete for coveted slots in the higher education system and job market.

"Because of the pressure of society these days and that whole achievement thing," said Judi Levine, co-president of Smash's Parent, Teacher and Student Association, "parents are constantly wondering, 'How are our kids faring compared with other kids, where will they be when they finish year eight and have to go into the high schools or the private schools and have to compete with everybody else? Are they getting it all?'"

Laura Sherman, a veteran Smash teacher, agreed. "We have had parents say, 'If my child does not learn the multiplication tables in third grade, he will not get into Harvard,'" she said.

Kay Wall of Greenwich, Conn., quit her job at a market research firm to spend more time with her son and become involved in his public elementary school. Frustrated with playing the booster-club role, she and a group of parents started Academic Challenge in Education, an organization that helped elect local Board of Education members supporting parent involvement as well as the parents' back-to-basics philosophy.

"Everyone had already jumped on the bandwagon to do more fund-raising to build a playground, all the other ancillary activities," she said. "There were a lot of well-educated moms and others who were just concerned about knowing what the kids were being taught."

Efforts by parents like Ms. Wall to have more say in what their children learn can result in a tug of war over who should design curriculum or teaching strategies and whose knowledge is more valuable — the parents' understanding of their own children's learning styles or the teachers' expertise in how different children learn and how to address the needs of 25 to 30 students at once. Often parents get defensive and angry, and teachers feel hurt and offended.

"They make you feel like you don't know as much as you do," said Carrie Ferguson, a teacher at Smash. She said there is a perception among some parents that they have to come in and save the schools from the teachers. "They don't realize that this staff does research and has theories on what we are doing," she added. "We are not just coming in here and saying, 'Turn to page 35.'"

Some advocates of increased parental input argue that schools should act more like private companies competing for customers and less like government-run bureaucracies with captive clientele. This pressure, experts say, has led to changes in local school policies. In an effort to satisfy parents, for instance, the Rochester School Board recently approved a plan to use parent surveys as part of its evaluation process for teachers and administrators.

"I take the view that parents ought to be viewed principally as our customers," said Clifford B. Janey, Rochester's Superintendent of Schools.

Sari Knopp Biklen, a professor of education at Syracuse University who has studied how teachers' work is defined by their environments, found that they were often resistant to what parents had to say.

"They wanted parents to act like clients," she said, "and parents, on the other hand, thought of themselves more as customers, and the customer is always right."

In surveys of parents and teachers, the Phi Delta Kappan magazine found that only 25 percent of teachers believed parents should have more say in public-school curriculums, compared with 53 percent of parents.

This resistance, some say, is because nearly 40 percent of teachers in the United States have taught for at least two decades and are set in more traditional ways. "You have some older teachers who are a part of the older culture that says, 'Get out of my classroom,'" said Gloria N. Howard, a former teacher in Providence, R. I., who is a consultant for schools, working with parents and communities. Yet today's more educated parents, she added, know they have a right to demand certain services from schools.

EDUCATORS WHO OPPOSE giving parents added influence are swimming against a powerful political current, with policy makers pushing more and more legislation to make schools responsive. The new laws differ from state to state, from requiring school districts to develop policies for increasing parents' roles, to mandating that employers give parents time off to attend parent-teacher conferences, to spelling out parental rights on matters like visiting classes or accessing data on schools.

For instance, Michigan recently passed a law giving parents the right to review curriculum, textbook and teaching materials. The Illinois and New York legislatures have mandated that the Chicago and New York City districts include parents on school governing councils.

Critics argue, however, that efforts to give parents more decision-making power often never get beyond the paper proclamation. John C. Fager, executive director of the New York City Parents Coalition, said the New York law mandating that parents sit on city school councils provides only "lip service" to meaningful involvement. These councils, unlike those in Chicago, have no decision-making authority, especially in controlling budgets and hiring and firing principals.

Charter school legislation was devised to provide a more direct parental role. In addition to other parent-involvement legislation, some 30 states have passed laws allowing parents and teachers to create autonomous charter schools, driven in part by parents' visions of what schools should be. Many of the schools created under these laws encourage and sometimes require a greater parent involvement in everything from fund-raising to administrating to teaching elective classes in art, drama and computers.

Approximately two-thirds of California's charter schools require parents to sign contracts stipulating a certain number of hours that they will be involved in the school.

Still, the scope of the parent-involvement movement is still being debated. Professor Lareau of Temple University believes the rise in parental input reflects a minority of parents who are upper middle class and have the education and political clout to challenge educators. Her research and other studies show that lower-income parents with less formal education say they do not feel welcome in schools and are not likely to question teachers' decisions.

> 'Most of us grew up in a time when the teacher was the boss, and now we are all challenging that role.'

Ms. Epstein, while acknowledging some social-class differences, noted that programs like Head Start for preschoolers have tried to teach low-income parents that they can play a role in their children's education. In 1994, the regulations for Title 1, the Federal compensatory education program for low-income students, were revised to mandate family-school connections and collaborations. Ms. Epstein is currently directing a network of 750 schools across the country, including many in urban and poor areas, that is trying to set up procedures to accommodate parents.

Another issue that schools grapple with is that not all parents are pushing for the same ideas at the same time, making it difficult for educators to please everyone.

At Smash, where most parents are affluent and well educated, some remain committed to its progressive teaching methods, while others want a more structured environment.

A group of parents recently protested that their children were not learning basic skills, including multiplication and long division, the way their generation had in elementary school. Because of the school's philosophy, students learn through independent projects instead of memorization. Rather than sitting quietly in rows of desks, they work in open classrooms accommodating children of different ages.

PARADOXICALLY, THIS IS THE learning environment the parents who helped found Smash 25 years ago were seeking. Well ahead of the current trend, they were also seeking to create a school where parents, students and staff made decisions together. While Smash parents continue to play a central role, they have yet to find a comfortable middle ground on the core curriculum and how students spend their time at school.

To help her staff and parents come to a better understanding of the direction of the school, Ms. Montera is creating several new forums, including education seminars for parents and parent coffees, where teachers explain their approaches and parents voice their concerns and pose questions.

"That's the way it has to be done," she said. "We all have to make decisions together."

At a recent morning coffee, 23 parents gathered to talk to Ms. Montera and two teachers. One parent wanted to know if the "chaos" he saw when he dropped his daughter off in the morning was the way it was "supposed" to be. Other parents complained about a lack of daily structure.

Ms. Montera kept bringing the discussion back to the contradictions of being an alternative school in the competitive climate of the 90's. Parents with older children also defended the school's philosophy, telling newer parents that their children emerge with the knowledge they need to pass standardized tests while gaining more self-esteem.

Getting parents and teachers to collaborate on the direction of a school is not easy, Ms. Heider-Pass noted. "Although we all have our children's interest at heart," she said, "we are also all very ferocious about protecting that and what that means." ■

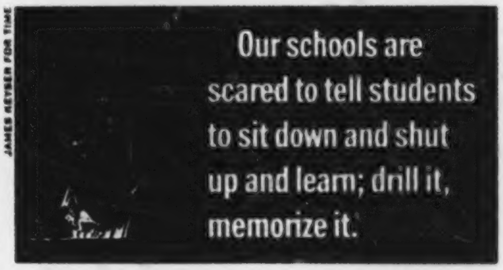
Time, May 25, 1998

No—Learn First, Surf Later

QUACK MEDICINE COMES IN TWO VARIETIES: "IRRELEVANT but harmless" and "toxic." The Administration's plan to wire American classrooms for Internet service is toxic quackery. Four-fifths of U.S. schools have Internet access already; instead of wiring the rest, we ought to lay down a startling new educational directive: First learn reading and writing, history and arithmetic. Then play Frisbee, go fishing or surf the Internet. Lessons first, fun second.

I've used the Internet nearly every day since September 1982. It's a great way to gather information, communicate and shop. And in one sense, the Internet is good for the American mind. Up through the early '90s, everyday written communication seemed to be dying out. Thanks to e-mail and fax machines, writing has come back. In this respect, the Internet could be a fine teaching tool—a way to share good, scarce writing teachers. One teacher could manage a whole district of students if they were all connected electronically.

But the push to net-connect every school is an educational disaster in the making. Our schools are in crisis. Statistics prove what I see every day as a parent and a college educator. My wife and I have a constant struggle to get our young boys to master the basic skills they need and our schools hate to teach. As a college teacher, I see the sorry outcome: students who can't write worth a damn, who lack basic math and language skills. Our schools are scared to tell students to sit down and shut up and learn; drill it, memorize it, because you must master it whether it's fun or not. Children pay the price for our educational cowardice.


Our schools are scared to tell students to sit down and shut up and learn; drill it, memorize it.

JAMES KEYSER FOR TIME

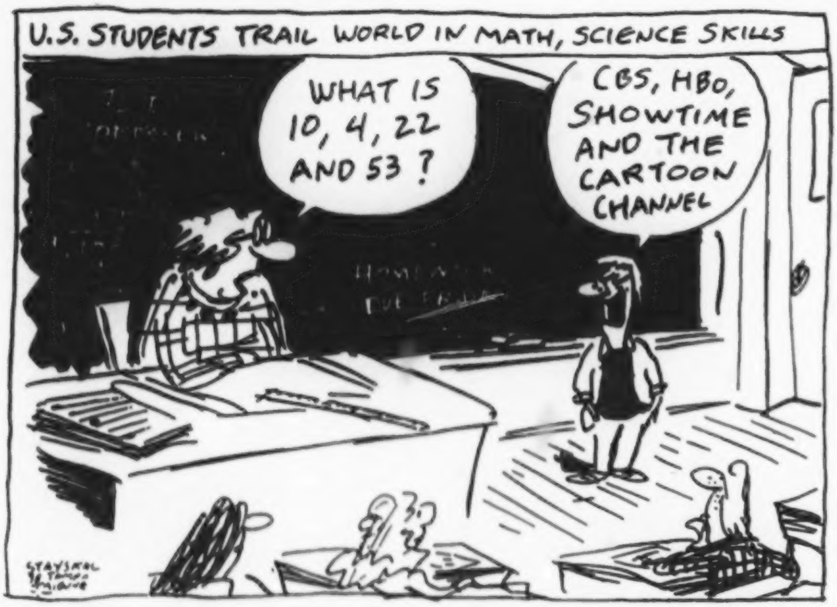
I've never met one parent or teacher or student or principal or even *computer salesman* who claimed that *insufficient data* is the root of the problem. With an Internet connection, you can gather the latest stuff from all over, but too many American high school students have never read one Mark Twain novel or Shakespeare play or Wordsworth poem, or a serious history of the U.S.; they are bad at science, useless at mathematics, hopeless at writing—but if they could only connect to the latest websites in Passaic and Peru, we'd see improvement? The Internet, said President Clinton in February, "could make it possible for every child with access to a computer to stretch a hand across a keyboard to reach every book ever written, every painting ever painted, every symphony ever composed." Pardon me, Mr. President, but this is demented. Most American children don't know what a symphony *is*. If we suddenly figured out how to teach each child *one* movement of *one* symphony, that would be a miracle.

And our skill-free children are overwhelmed by information even *without* the Internet. The glossy magazines and hundred-odd cable channels, the videotapes and computer CDs in most libraries and many homes—they need *more* information? It's as if the Administration were announcing that every child must have the fanciest scuba gear on the market—but these kids don't know how to swim, and fitting them out with scuba gear isn't just useless, it's irresponsible; they'll drown.

And it gets worse. Our children's attention spans are too short already, but the Web is a propaganda machine for short attention spans. The instant you get bored, click the mouse, and you're someplace else. Our children already prefer pictures to words, glitz to substance, fancy packaging to serious content. But the Web propagandizes relentlessly for glitz and pictures, for video and stylish packaging. And while it's full of first-rate information, it's also full of lies, garbage and pornography so revolting you can't even describe it. There is no quality control on the Internet.

Still, imagine a well-run, serious school with an Internet hookup in the library for occasional use by students under supervision who are working on research projects; would that be so bad? No. Though it ranks around 944th on my list of important school improvements, it's not bad. But in reality, too many schools will use the Internet the same way they use computers themselves: to entertain children at minimal cost to teachers. If children are turned loose to surf, then Internet in the schools won't be a minor educational improvement, it will be a major disaster. Another one. Just what we need. ■

Gelernter is a professor of computer science at Yale. His 1991 book, Mirror Worlds, *predicted something like today's Web.*


U.S. STUDENTS TRAIL WORLD IN MATH, SCIENCE SKILLS
WHAT IS 10, 4, 22 AND 53 ?
CBS, HBO, SHOWTIME AND THE CARTOON CHANNEL
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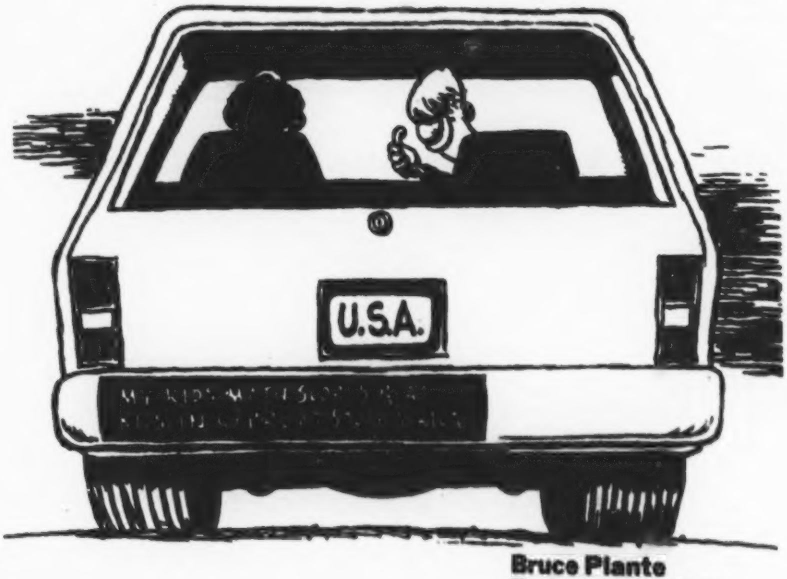
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